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Qudah to take over IOJ this week

AMMAN (J.T.) — The newly-elected leadership of the International Organisation of Journalists (IOJ) begins a week-long meeting in Prague starting Monday attended by Jordan's Suleiman Qudah, the IOJ president. Mr. Qudah will leave for the Czech capital Sunday to head the meeting, which will group the new IOJ secretary general and treasurer. Mr. Qudah, head of Jordan Press Association (JPA), and his team will be handed over their task at the helm of the organisation from the outgoing leadership led by Gerard Gatinot of France. Mr. Qudah said in a statement Saturday that he would study the financial and professional aspects of the (IOJ) as well as relations between the organisation and other world press groups. "We also plan to study amendments to the IOJ charter as endorsed by the organisation's 12th conference, which was held in Amman last month," he said. These amendments concern the IOJ mechanism and the organisation's attitude with regard to issues pertaining to press freedoms around the world. Mr. Qudah said the Prague meeting would discuss IOJ's investments. Mr. Qudah, who is deputy chief editor of Al Ra'i daily is the first Arab to head the Prague-based organisation.

Yemeni, Omani leaders hold talks

SALALAH (Agencies) — Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh and Sultan Qaboos Ben Said held talks here Saturday about Yemen's border dispute with Saudi Arabia, the official Omani News Agency (ONA) said. Yemen accused Saudi Arabia last month of massing troops along the border as the two neighbours held talks in Riyadh to try to resolve the dispute over three border provinces under Saudi control since a 1934 agreement. Yemen says the agreement expired in 1992. The two leaders met in Salalah, 1,000 kilometres south of the capital Muscat, to discuss the "current negotiations on the dispute in order to reach a solution guaranteeing peace and stability in the region," ONA said. Mr. Saleh was accompanied by Foreign Minister Abdul Karim Al Iryani. "Narrowing of points of view in the context of the Saudi-Yemeni dialogue occurred to achieve the aspired aim of security and stability in the region," the ONA report said. It did not elaborate on the outcome of the talks or say if Sultan Qaboos had clinched a breakthrough in the 60-year-old dispute.

Washington meeting seeks to end Israel-PLO impasse

Syrian track remains in limbo; Egypt to raise NPT

WASHINGTON (Agencies) — Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) meet in Washington today (Sunday) to try to revive Middle East peace hopes amid a series of unresolved disputes that have brought progress to a standstill.

U.S. officials hosting the one-day meeting concede that the peace process is in trouble after a string of violence that has led Israel to close its borders to Palestinians and toughen its line in autonomy talks.

But they hope the parties will come up with new ideas and reaffirm their determination that the "enemies of peace" — meaning the guerrillas behind the attacks — will not prevail.

"This is a difficult period it's a period of some stress we always knew there would be ups and downs, and the challenge is to work through it," one official said.

Although the meeting is at foreign ministers level, U.S. President Bill Clinton will attend the start of it in a demonstration of his stake in the process that has seen dramatic advances during his presidency, officials said.

Jordan, which signed a peace treaty with Israel last year, is holding out hope for a successful meeting Sunday.

"We will try to accomplish as much as possible on security and other obstacles," Ambassador Fayez Tarawneh said in an interview Friday. "Jordan, with Egypt, is in a good position to mediate. We have good relations both with Israel and the PLO."

The meeting, to be chaired by Secretary of State Warren Christopher, is meant to give substance to declarations of intent to work for peace that emerged from a Cairo summit Feb. 2 which brought together the leaders of the same four parties.

Although Washington hailed that summit as historic, euphoria quickly faded when a meeting on Thursday between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat failed to produce results.

The two could not break a deadlock on issues holding up implemention of the next steps in the Israel-PLO peace deal, including violence, Jewish settlement construction and Israel's ban on Palestinians entering the Jewish state.

Israel and the PLO are trying to agree on a redeployment of Israeli troops from some West Bank towns to be followed by Palestinian elections.

Mr. Arafat has since appealed to world leaders to save his peace deal with Israel, and one of his aides said on Friday that the United States, as chief sponsor of the peace process, "must intervene right away to resuscitate the talks."

But a senior U.S. official, briefing reporters on condition he was not be identified, said: "I don't think that we're going to be presenting specific proposals."

"What we obviously are going to be doing is focussing on what can be done not only to change the climate but... to build tangible forms of cooperation," he said.

"They're determined to make a statement that this process is not going to be reversed."

Sunday's meeting at Blair House almost opposite the White House will bring together foreign ministers Shimon Peres of Israel, Amr Musa of Egypt and Abdul Karim Al Kabariti of Jordan. Top negotiator Nabil Shaath will represent the PLO.

The U.S. official said among subjects discussed would be Israel's prime concern of "security" and ways of making sure aid gets through to the Palestinians.

Economic cooperation — seen by Washington as an important underpinning for the peace process — would also come up, he said.

But he added: "I wouldn't expect that we would come to any conclusions from this meeting. This is an initial discussion."

He said the meeting was expected to be the first of a series and ministers would discuss whether they themselves or lower level officials should attend subsequent meetings.

Egypt urged Israel Saturday to be more flexible in its talks with the Palestinians warning that otherwise the whole peace process could be jeopardised.

"Egypt calls on Israel to show more flexibility to reach an accord with the Palestinian Authority as soon as possible," Osama Al Baz, spokesman for President Hosni Mubarak, told journalists.

"Egypt is worried about the deadlock in talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority," Mr. Baz said.

"If the negotiations are blocked on this track, that risks putting the whole of the peace process that we are trying to build into reverse for each stone affects the whole of the building."

Israel has to "respond favourably to the Palestinian negotiators, given that the Palestinian Authority has

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KING HOSTS IFTAR: **His Majesty King Hussein on Saturday hosted an iftar in honour of tribal leaders and representatives of public and private sectors in Irbid Governorate. The iftar was attended by His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah Ben Al Hussein, Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker, Royal Court Chief Marwan Al Qasem, the King's advisors, Chief Chamberlain Prince Ra'd Ben Zeid, His Royal Highness Prince Talal Ben Mohammad, the King's military secretary, Prince Firas Ben Ra'd and the governor of Irbid. The King and the guests performed Al Maghreb prayers together (Petra photo)**

Sharif Zeid receives Za'noun

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker Saturday received Palestine National Council (PNC) Acting Speaker Salim Al Za'noun who is currently visiting Jordan. Sharif Zeid and Mr. Za'noun discussed means of enhancing Jordanian-Palestinian relations. Mr. Za'noun said in statements to the press that he congratulated the prime minister on Jordan's regaining of its lands which were occupied by Israel.

Cabinet meets

AMMAN (Petra) — The Council of Ministers met Saturday evening and approved Jordan's hosting of a conference for Arab culture ministers in 1996. The Cabinet, meetng under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker, decided to set up a committee which will be headed by Deputy Prime Minister and Information Minister Khaled Al Karaki to prepare a study on the Maan glass factory.

Egypt urges Interpol to arrest militant

CAIRO (AFP) — Egypt has called on Interpol to arrest a Muslim militant leader wanted for planning an attack on President Hosni Mubarak who is apparently now living in London, police said. Yasser Tufik Ali sneaked out of Egypt after an attack on Prime Minister Atef Sedki in 1993 and initially headed for Yemen, police said. He was sentenced to death in his absence in a 1993 trial into the Sedki attack. His name also figures among 51 militants accused of relaunching an armed group the Al Jihad under a new name Talaeh Al Fatah, which is accused of planning to attack Mr. Mubarak. All 51 were Saturday sent for trial before a military court under a presidential decree issued on Monday. Mr. Ali is "currently apparently living in London," the police spokesman added. Egyptian authorities have been trying for two years to win the extradition of several militant leaders living in Europe. Among them is Talaat Fuad Quassaem, sentenced to death in 1992, who is now living in Denmark, Ayman Al Zawahri, a leader of Al Jihad living in Switzerland and Mohammad Shawqui Al Islambuli is living in Pakistan.

Women stage protest in Bahrain

NICOSIA (AFP) — Dozens of women demonstrated in front of a Bahraini court on Saturday demanding the release of prisoners held during unrest which flared in December and January, witnesses said Saturday. Police swiftly broke up the demonstration in front of the high court in Manama which for the past few days has been holding the trials of those charged with inciting the unrest, an opposition member said contacted by AFP in Nicosia. Several of the women were forced to get into public buses emptied of their original passengers to be driven away from the court, he added. The trial is taking place in the absence of any defendants, and the hearing is purely based on their files. The last unrest in Bahrain was reported on Jan. 27 during the funerals of two Shiite Muslims killed by security forces.

Maroni to quit Northern League

MILAN (AFP) — Former Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni announced Saturday that he would quit his party, the federalist Northern League, and submit his resignation as a member of parliament within the next few days. Mr. Maroni, addressing a Northern League congress in Milan, said he had lost his battle in the federalist party he helped found. "I have lost my political battle within the league. My role in the Northern League is completed," he said.

EU team meets Sharif Zeid, supports Jordan, peace efforts

AMMAN (Petra) — A team from the European Union (EU) said after talks on Saturday with Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker that the EU was ready to reach agreement with Jordan on cooperation in various fields.

The team, led by Dennis Bauchard, head of the Middle East and North Africa desk at the French ministry for foreign affairs, reviewed developments in the region at their meeting with the prime minister and discussed Jordan's endeavours to give momentum to the peace process on all tracks.

The meeting gave special attention to EU-Jordan cooperation in economic matters and means to ensure the achievement of sustainable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Also reviewed were plans to hold a conference in Barcelona in November to be attended by EU and Arab countries around the Mediterranean Sea.

Sharif Zeid stressed Jordan's keenness on seeking just and comprehensive peace. He outlined Jordan's efforts towards this end.

He voiced Jordan's appreciation of EU's efforts to back the peace process and provide economic aid to the region.

Mr. Bauchard, a former ambassador to Jordan, outlined the EU mission to the region last week led by French Minister of Foreign Affairs Alain Juppe and said that the EU was keen on maintaining strong ties with Jordan. Europe appreciates Jordan's endeavours and its leading role in the region, he said.

Present at the meeting with the three member delegation was acting foreign minister Khaled Karaki and ambassadors of several EU countries to Jordan.

Speaking to reporters afterwards Mr. Bauchard said the Juppe-led EU tour of the region aimed at persuading the concerned parties to the peace process, particularly the Palestinians and Israel to try to overcome all obstacles on the way to peace.

Mr. Bauchard said the EU was ready to conclude agreements with Jordan to bolster the momentum of peace and to back the Kingdom's endeavours in all fields.

He said that the planned Amman economic conference in October would present a good opportunity to further enhance EU-Jordan relations as the EU plans to play a key role in ensuring the conference's success.

Mr. Bauchard told reporters that he discussed with Sharif Zeid EU's invitation to Jordan to take part in the Barcelona conference, which will discuss political, economic, security and humanitarian issues of concern to the countries of the Mediterranean basin.

Jordan's envoy to Syria dies, laid to rest

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan's Ambassador to Syria Ahmad Adaileh died early Saturday at the King Hussein Medical Centre. He was laid to rest at Thannieh, his home village near Karak.

Several cabinet members led by Minister of Information Khaled Karaki attended the funeral along with members of Arab and foreign diplomatic missions in Jordan.

Adaileh had been under treatment at the King Hussein Medical Centre.

His Majesty King Hussein delegated the governor of Karak to attend the funeral and offer his sympathy to the bereaved family.

Notables of the Adaileh clan voiced their appreciation of the King's gesture.

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan delegated the director of the Karak police department to take part in the funeral.

His Royal Highness Prince Mohammad delegated retired army officer Major-General Mohammad Shobaki to attend the funeral while Syrian Foreign Minister

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Israeli minister: Accord with PLO is not sacred

TEL AVIV (Agencies) — Israel wants to keep its troops in West Bank towns during Palestinian elections contrary to its peace deal with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), an Israeli minister said on Saturday.

But a senior Palestinian official warned if Israel did not honour its agreements with the PLO, the parties would face "a complete collapse of the whole peace process."

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat on Thursday failed to break a deadlock on issues holding up Palestinian elections in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Mr. Arafat has appealed to world leaders to help save the peace process. Officials from Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the PLO are due to meet in Washington on Sunday to discuss ways to break the current impasse. (see separate story).

"We've proposed elections to them (the Palestinians) if they are prepared (to accept) that they be held while we are in the towns," Israeli Health Minister Ephraim Sneh, a former West Bank army commander, told Israel Radio.

When challenged that this violated the 1993 Oslo peace deal between Israel and the PLO which called for an Israeli military redeployment outside Arab population centres ahead of elections, Mr. Sneh said: "Correct."

"The Oslo agreement said to implement it (elections) on the 15 July 1994 but for us security is sacred and not the dates of Oslo, with all due respect. We will not take steps that are, from our point of view, a danger to security."

Talks between Israel and the PLO are stuck over Israel's demand for a Palestinian clampdown on militant groups and Palestinian demands that Israel lift its closure of the West Bank and Gaza and stop settlement activities in the areas.

In Gaza, Saeb Erekat, who holds the local government portfolio in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), said Israel's failure to implement the next stage of its self-rule agreement with the PLO would jeopardise the future of peace.

"The peace process has reached a point where it has to be decided if Israel needs peace through implementation of the agreement — redeployment, elections and a halt to settlements," Dr. Erekat said after the authority's weekly meeting in Gaza.

"If not, if Israel does not want peace, then we are facing a complete collapse of the whole peace process," he said.

Dr. Erekat said he would meet with Israel's chief negotiator Yoel Singer in Jericho on Monday to discuss talks on Palestinian elections due to resume in Cairo on Feb. 21.

The last talks ended Wednesday with little progress.

At the time, Dr. Erekat said the two sides had stumbled on drawing up a list of outstanding issues in order of priority. But Mr. Singer described the negotiations as having achieved "very good results."

Disagreement over the composition of a council to run self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza has long dogged talks on elections.

The PLO has demanded a large body with legislative powers, while the Israelis want a smaller council with an administrative role only.

Following the weekly meeting of the PNA, minis-

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Iraq: Turkey can reopen pipeline

ISTANBUL (Agencies) — Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Saeed Al Sahaf, on the highest-level visit from Baghdad since the Gulf war, said Saturday that Turkey had every right to reopen temporarily a joint oil pipeline closed under a U.N. embargo.

The embargo was imposed on Baghdad after its invasion of Kuwait more than four years ago.

Mr. Sahaf told a news conference here that Iraq was doing its best to develop relations with Turkey and invited Turkish Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Murat Karayalcin to Baghdad.

Mr. Sahaf added that in Baghdad's opinion, autonomy was the best solution to the conflict in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. However, he accused the United States of "provoking the Kurds," saying Baghdad could not tolerate any foreign interference in its internal affairs.

Earlier, Mr. Sahaf called on Premier Tansu Ciller, after which Mr. Karayalcin told reporters the talks covered a variety of topics including bilateral relations and the reopening of the joint oil pipeline.

A proposal for the reopening of the pipeline would release part of the 11.8 million barrels of crude that remained idle since the war. Of the total, 27 million barrels would be flushed to Turkey within six months to be used in Turkey's domestic refining network. A portion of the proceeds would go to a U.N. war reparations fund.

Under the proposal, Turkey would also deliver to Iraq humamitarian supplies in exchange for the oil. Mr. Karayalcin said agreement was not reached on the subject but that Turkey would submit its proposal in writing at a later date for Iraq to study.

Despite four-year sanctions on Iraq, the U.N. has approved the operation provided Iraq spends the money it gets on humanitarian needs and the U.N. can monitor distribution of those supplies. Iraq so far has refused U.N. supervision.

Mr. Sahaf said Iraq and Turkey were looking for a formula which did not intervene in Iraq's internal affairs.

Mr. Karayalcin said Iraq was working on a blueprint to distribute the humanitarian supplies and would convey it to Turkey later. Turkey says it will only go ahead with the operation if the U.N. approves.

Turkey cut the flow of oil in 1990 to conform to the U.N. sanctions on Iraq.

The two neighbours also discussed political relations and the complex question of autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan.

Despite a Turkish statement that it respected Iraq's territorial integrity, the Iraqi foreign minister said Baghdad was unhappy that Turkey hosted U.S.-led forces opposed to the Iraqi government.

He said Iraq had not asked Turkey to deny access to the allied forces because that would be an interference in Turkey's internal policies.

"But we express our views," Mr. Sahaf said. "The U.S. will leave the region one day, but Turkey and Iraq will remain."

"We believe Turkish-Iraqi relations ... are very important for peace in the Middle East and for the economic and social development (of

(Continued on page 7)

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Saudi Arabia said not attending peace meeting

WASHINGTON (R) — The United States considered having a Saudi observer at a Washington meeting on Sunday aimed at breathing new life into the faltering Middle East peace process but the idea apparently was dropped, officials said on Friday.

A senior U.S. official had told Reuters the observer was expected and would be an important step to indicate broad support for the embattled peace process.

But late on Friday, as plans for the meeting were firming up, another senior official said only Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) would be represented.

This second official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity, said wider representation was considered but the decision was made to only include those countries who had been at a meeting in Cairo last week.

"We considered whether it would be useful (to have other Arab representation). We thought about that. But our basic judgement is at this point it is best and probably most appropriate to keep it limited to those who participated in Cairo," he said.

He added that "somewhere down the road" the process may be expanded.

Earlier, another senior official told Reuters: "I think there'll be a Saudi observer there, which is something that has not been done before."

"It's an important step... to indicate that peace is supported broadly in the region despite the attacks on it," he added.

Officials at the Saudi embassy in Washington were not immediately available for comment.

Although Riyadh is not directly involved in the peace process, Washington believes its backing is vital because of its wealth and religious importance in the Arab World.

Sunday's meeting follows a failed summit on Thursday between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat that an official acknowledged has struck "some real and psychological blows to the peace process."

But he said one of the U.S. roles was to try to keep the peace process on track when it came under attack by "the enemies of peace" — a phrase Washington uses to describe guerrillas who have launched recent attack on Israel.

The official said the purpose of the meeting was "basically to show the good guys moving forward. That's very important pyschologically." He said it could issue statements reaffirming support for the peace process and condemning violence and might take "some specific steps," which he declined to spell out.

He said the meeting was likely to discuss Israel's ban on Palestinians entering the Jewish state, in effect since suicide bombers killed 21 Israelis on Jan. 22.

The ban, which has kept tens of thousands of Palestinians from jobs in Israel, is one of the main PLO complaints against Israel but they are also deadlocked over an Israeli troop redeployment in the West Bank ahead of Palestinian elections there.

In Gaza, the Palestinian Authority said PLO official Nabil Shaath would attend the Washington meeting.

"The Palestinian Authority held an urgent cabinet meeting this evening and decided to send a delegation to Washington to attend the meeting which will start on Sunday," said Nabil Abu Irdeineh, an aide to Mr. Arafat.

The meeting comes on the heels of a failed summit on Thursday between Mr. Arafat and Mr. Rabin.

5 aid workers freed in Sudan

NAIROBI (R) — Five foreign aid workers taken hostage in southern Sudan were freed on Saturday "smelly but smiling."

Aid officials said the men — two Ethiopians, a Swiss and two Kenyans — were handed to U.N. officials at Doleib Hill, 30 kilometres south of the government-held town of Malakal.

"They're smelly but smiling," Trevor Harvey, manager of a U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) camp at Lokichokio in northwest Kenya, told headquarters by radio as he flew back with the five.

"They are fine and in good spirits," said Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) spokeswoman Sally Burnheim, adding nothing was given to the kidnappers led by a former rebel commander as a ransom.

Mr. Harvey was aboard a U.N. plane that set out from Lokichokio to hunt for the five aid workers who were among 11 kidnapped on Wednesday in Waat town in Upper Nile province and driven north with some 130 gunmen.

The kidnappers were led by Gordon Koang Banypiny, accused by his former rebel group — the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) — of being a Khartoum government agent.

Six hostages were freed on Thursday night and Friday in return for food. The five released on Saturday work for UNICEF, Britain's Save the Children Fund and Swiss Disaster Releif.

It was believed to be the first kidnapping of foreign aid workers in southern Sudan, devastated by 12 years of civil war. U.N. officials had feared it might set a dangerous precedent.

Mr. Burnheim said OLS was advised by SSIM on Saturday to pull all its staff out of three locations in Upper Nile as government forces, apparently mounting a long-awaited dry season offensive, thrust out of Malakal on Friday and took the village of Baliet.

She said the temporary evacuation of staff was going ahead.

SSIM, which is led by Riek Machar, said in a statement its rebels made "a tactical withdrawal" from Baliet on the River Sobat after fierce fighting.

In a separate statement, it said government troops attacked one of its bases at Paitaeth on Saturday. "SSIM forces are putting up stiff resistance against the enemy advance," it said.

Khartoum's forces seem to be making their first major dry season offensive in three years against Christian and animist rebels fighting for self-determination for the south since 1983.

In another development, aid officials said some 50,000 southern Sudanese displaced from twin camps at Labone fled into Uganda, five kilometres to the south, on Friday.

David Evans, a representative of Norwegian People's Aid, told Reuters a total of 31 aid workers evacuated Labone on Friday after unidentified firing near Labone two camp.

"The camp authorities first moved the people from camp two to camp one and later all of them crossed into northern Uganda. Our representative there however says they are waiting to see what happens and may return if there is security," he added.

"We had a fully functioning hospital in Labone with 100 beds and the patients literally picked their bandages up and walked out yesterday with the others. The hospital is empty," he said.

Rebels of the mainstream Sudan People's Liberation army and government troops have fought just northwest of Labone over Parajok village since Khartoum's forces seized it in December.

U.S. seeks change in Iran's behaviour

WASHINGTON (USIA) — The United States wants Iran to change its behaviour to conform with international standards, the acting spokeswoman emphasised when asked about House Speaker Newt Gingrich's Feb. 8 call for the eventual forced replacement of Iran's regime.

"This administration has consistently condemned and vigorously opposed specific aspects of Iranian policy, including Iran's support for violent groups seeking to destroy the peace process, Tehran's continuing support for terrorism, Iran's ongoing pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, its efforts to subvert other governments, and its dismal human rights record at home," spokeswoman Christine Shelly said.

"The objective of our policy is to bring focused and coordinated international pressure, both economic and political, on Iran to change its behaviour to conform to international standards. The administration has focused on areas we believe will have a maximum impact in influencing Iran's behaviour such as arms transfers, dual-use technology, and credit," she said.

Asked if the United States was seeking the overthrow of the current Iranian regime, Ms. Shelly replied: "Not as such, no. Iran's government is for the Iranian people to decide. As I stated before, our interest is in getting Iran to change it behaviour."

Speaking to a conference of military and intelligence officers Wednesday, Mr. Gingrich said "the only long-range solution that makes any sense" is for the United States to pursue an overall strategy that "ultimately is designed to force the replacement of the current regime in Iran."

Israeli soldier's death 'verifying the kill'

TEL AVIV (AP) — An Israeli Druze army officer may have been shot to death by his own troops after they mistook him for a wounded guerrilla, a weekly newspaper reported Friday.

The article in Kol Ha'ir, in which northern commander Major General Amiram Levine did not confirm or deny the allegations, raised new doubts about an alleged policy known here as "verifying the kill" — shooting wounded guerrillas point-blank to ensure death.

The army has said that guerrilla fire killed Major Kiwan Hamed on Dec. 19, 1994, in an Israeli-controlled zone of southern Lebanon.

But after Kol Ha'ir and a second newspaper, Kolbo Haifa, began questioning the army version, chief of staff Lieutenant-General Amnon Shahak on Friday appointed retired Gen. Moshe Levy, a former army chief of staff, to investigate the incident.

Media reports Thursday said the army had withheld information on Hamed's death from his family, who are from the Druze minority whose members serve in Israel's army. The report suggested Hamed may have been hit by "friendly fire."

The two newspapers Friday quoted testimony from an anonymous solider who said he was a member of Hamed's unit who fought in the battle in which he was killed.

"We were to charge toward the building, and we didn't see that our commander, Maj. Hamed, was not in the area. We charged, shooting in all directions," the soldier was quoted as saying.

"Outside the building we saw a man. We opened fire. The man fell. We went close, a few soldiers, and saw that he was lying on his side. One carried out the verification killing procedure as we were taught in many exercises — to shoot a wounded guerrilla in the head to make sure he is dead."

The battle continued in heavy fog and rain. Only afterwards did the soldiers realise they had shot their commander, who had forged ahead of his soldiers during the charge, Kol Ha'ir said.

It was not immediately clear why the soldiers did not recognise their commander or his uniform.

Gen. Levine, asked by Kol Ha'ir about the soldier's allegations, was quoted only as saying, "Okay, so what? I can pull similar incidents from my sleeve. I suggest you ignore it."

Hamed's brother Kamal told Israel Television that "as far as the family concerned the case is closed... we have confidence the General (Levine) told us the truth."

A military source, speaking on condition of anonymity, denied the army had any "verification of kill" policy.

"There is no deliberate shooting of a wounded person," the source said.

But another former northern commander, retired General Yossi Peled, told Israel Radio there exists "the concept that after a charge you verify that all are dead" to insure against a sudden attack from behind.

The Israeli human rights group Betselem has complained to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin about such actions against Palestinians in Israel's occupied territories.

But Betselem Director Yizhar Beer said the practice would be viewed differently if used in Lebanon.

"There is a very fundamental difference between what happens in Lebanon in a war and what goes on during the policing of a civilian people in the territories," he said.

There have been several past incidents where such killings are suspected. In 1992, an undercover soldier was killed by friendly fire in circumstances similar to the reports of Hamed's death.

Greece seeks EU unity on Turkey deal

ATHENS (R) — Greece has called for European Union (EU) solidarity over its decision to reject an agreement in principle on forging an EU customs union with arch-rival Turkey.

"We want to believe that all EU countries, especially the big ones that can influence EU policy, will move in a spirit of EU solidarity," government spokesman Evangelos Venizelos told reporters.

EU foreign ministers, including Greek European Affairs Minister George Mangakis, agreed in principle on Monday to go ahead with a customs union with Turkey in return for Brussels setting a date to start talks with Cyprus on joining the EU.

But a Greek cabinet meeting on Wednesday, chaired by Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, decided to reject the deal saying several points needed to be improved before Athens could give its approval.

There was no clear reason why Greece decided to pour cold water on what had appeared to be a done deal. But many Athens radio stations and newspapers blasted the government early in the week, accusing it of selling out to Turkey.

Relations with Turkey are a highly emotive issue and Greece is in a volatile pre-election mood. The ruling Socialists need 10 more votes in parliament to elect a Greek president in April.

Intense wheeling-and-dealing is taking place daily among the rival parties and failure to elect a new Greek president would force immediate national elections.

Mr. Venizelos explained the rejection by saying Greece wants more specific deatils on EU membership for Cyprus, less money offered to Ankara to cope with the customs union and more aid to Greece's textile industry.

"The EU is a continuous negotiating field. Nothing is final and everything can be discussed if you know what you want and if you have certain positions where you stand firm," he said.

He said Mr. Papandreou sent letters to his EU counterparts on Friday explaining Greece's objections. Athens' shift of position prompted angry reactions from some of Greece's EU partners.

German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel expressed "regret and incomprehension" over Greek insistence to keep blocking the EU customs union with Turkey, saying EU members had already made big concessions to Athens.

"Any change of individual elements will endanger the package as a whole," Mr. Kinkel said in a statement on Thursday.

"The partners in the EU have already gone a long way to meet Greek interests. Germany played a decisive role in reaching a compromise by setting aside its own positions," he said.

France, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, said it remained hopeful the customs union could be agreed by March 6.

"The necessary initiatives will be taken to achieve this goal," Foreign Ministry spokesman Richard Duque told a news briefing.

He said an EU committee of permanent representatives was to meet on Friday in Brussels to discuss Athens' objections.

However, EU sources later said the meeting never took place.

The sources said it was cancelled after committee members concluded there was nothing of substance to discuss.

Both Ankara and Nicosia had welcomed news of the agreement, which was expected to give a boost to Turkey's ailing economy and help to speed up a solution to the Cyprus problem.

Closer EU-Turkey links have been blocked for years by a row between Athens and Ankara over the island of Cyprus.

U.N. unlikely to repeat Somalia, Annan asserts

NAIROBI (AFP) — The United Nations is unlikely to take on another law enforcement operation such as that just ending in Somalia, Under-Secretary General for U.N. Peacekeeping Operations Kofi Annan told a press conference in Nairobi Friday after returning from Mogadishu.

Instead, he said, the United Nations was likely to "farm out" such operations to regional groups or individual countries.

Mr. Annan pointed out that the U.S. and U.N. troops who arrived in Somalia in late 1992 — 30,000 strong at their peak — had halted famine deaths by preventing looting of relief convoys by clan militias, and that farmers were now producing surpluses.

But he admitted that "much of what we have achieved remains vulnerable to the threat of renewed conflict."

"The future of the country is still in the balance," he added.

Mr. Annan visited Mogadishu to review plans for the withdrawal of the last 8,000 U.N. troops under the protection of a U.S.-led armada.

Most civilians will be evacuated by Tuesday, and Mr. Annan said he expected the last soldier to leave by March 6 or 7.

The withdrawal, which follows the failure of rival warlords to agree on a government of national unity for Somalia, which has been without a government since the ouster of dictator Mohammad Siad Barre in January 1991, was a lesson to the leaders of regions in crisis that "the international community does not have unlimited resources, and that there is a limit to its patience," he said.

Mr. Annan said it "cannot be excluded" that inter-clan fighting will break out after the U.N. troops leave, but that he hoped it could be limited to Mogadishu, where rival militias might fight for the port and the airport.

The United Nations intended to maintain a political presence in Somalia, he said, and would conduct a detailed review of the situation a month after the pullout to see if it was safe for U.N. representatives to return to Mogadishu or some other city, such as the southern port of Kismayo.

The main lesson of the U.N. Operation in Somalia was that the United Nations must remain neutral in such situations, he said, adding that it was up to Somalia's warlords to agree on a future political structure.

"We did not have a mandate for trusteeship; we did not go there to colonise."

The withdrawal from Somalia under the protection of the U.S.-led "Operation United Shield" would be a case-study for other evacuations, such as the eventual pullout of U.N. troops from the former Yugoslavia, Mr. Annan said.

Egyptian mufti praised for anti-customs stand

CAIRO (AP) — Egyptian leaders are appealing to the public to play an active role in fighting Islamic extremists in the country.

In a front-page editorial Friday in the government-run Al Akhbar newspaper, editor Galal Dewidar said that it is not up to police alone to fight the radicals.

"It is the responsibility of the people — and all popular and official apparatus — who believe that killing and violence is not Islam or "jihad" (holy war) but is the tarnishing of true religion and unfair to the country," he wrote.

He also praised the grand sheikh of Al Azhar, Gad Al Haq Ali Gad Al Haq, for calling last week for the public to treat Islamic extremists as heretics.

Sheikh Gad Al Haq is one of Egypt's ranking clerics as head of Al Azhar, a major centre of scholarship for the Islamic World.

"I can say that this move from our side is the beginning of a new stage in which the banner of Islam will prevail against the conspirators and resentful who tarnish its wonderful principles and values," Mr. Dewidar wrote.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak late last month appealed in a national address marking police day for the public to support the efforts of security forces to combat the extremists.

5 killed in Egypt clashes

MINYA (AFP) — A 17-year-old girl and four militants died Saturday in two separate shootouts in the troubled southern Egyptian province of Minya, police said.

The girl, Abir Mohammad Sultan, was caught in crossfire between police and armed fundamentalists in the village of Al Odwa, 250 kilometres south of Cairo, officers said.

The militants escaped after the gunbattle.

Meanwhile, police shot dead four wanted militants who opened fire on officers as they tried to arrest them at their hideout in Abal Balad near Maghagha, also in Minya.

Afghan power transfer ready from Feb. 20

ISLAMABAD (Agencies) — President Burhanuddin Rabbani of Afghanistan will hand over power to a new leader in Kabul shortly after Feb. 20, a United Nations official announced here Saturday.

"The mechanism for the transfer of power between Mr. Rabbani and the new leadership will be in place from Feb. 20 in the Afghan capital," said the official, Charles Santos.

He said the transfer would take place the next day or Feb. 22.

The changeover would bring into force a ceasefire in the two and half year civil war in Afghanistan.

Mr. Rabbani's term of office ended last Dec. 28. He had agreed to stand down in favour of a more representative government that included neutral figures as well as figures from the nine main factions that fought the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Rabbani indicated in an interview published Saturday that he hoped to keep the mysterious Talibans on his side, but needed to know more about their origin.

The Talibans, who swept on to the Afghan political scene only a few months ago, took the town of Maidan Shahr Friday, just 50 kilometres from Kabul, and have said they intend to capture the capital.

Maidan Shahr was a major stronghold of Mr. Rabbani's bitter enemies, the Hezb-e-Islami of the Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, but the Talibans have never indicated any support for the president either. Mr. Rabbani told the French daily Liberation that Afghanistan was a deeply religious country.

"So any movement or action of a religious nature is supported by the people," he said.

"We have asked our commanders in the areas we control to help them to free the roads, disarm the combattants, end corruption. But we have also warned the Talibans to shun foreign interference and internal opportunism which act secretly and discredit their enterprise."

Mr. Rabbani said he wanted to know who was flying the Talibans' warplanes and driving their tanks, and who were their strategists, adding, "if ever we discover that a foreign hand is behind them we will ask the people to throw them out."

The Talibans, who already control eight provinces in southern Afghanistan, are said by many diplomats and experts to have received support in their early stages from Pakistan.

They have vowed to eliminate "criminal" factions and banditry which have plunged Afghanistan into anarchy since 1992.

They have also launched an Islamisation programme in areas under their control, making women take a low profile in society, fighting the drug trade and applying Islamic justice codes.

Burhanuddin Rabbani

According to diplomatic sources, the Talibans comprise 25,000 men and have an arsenal of 100 tanks and 10 warplanes.

The movement has received support from local people weary of the power struggle between Mr. Rabbani and Mr. Hekmatyar which has caused at least 20,000 deaths.

Mr. Rabbani blamed foreign interference for the continuation of the war, but he refused to say which countries were involved. He said he still hoped for a peaceful solution, and intended to hand over power, but the lack of a reliable mechanism prevented him from doing so.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel: 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

17:00 ... Cocottes Minutes
17:30 ... Que Le Meilleur Gagne
18:00 ... Pegase
19:00 ... News In French
19:15 ... Ushuaia
19:30 ... Best Stories
19:50 ... Charlie Chaplin
20:00 ... Erebus "Aftermath"
21:00 ... Step by Step
21:30 ... Heartbeat
22:00 ... News in English
22:20 ... Feature film: "Threshold"
23:59 ... Till We Meet Again

PRAYER TIMES

04:59 ... Fajr
06:18 ... (Sunrise) Duha
11:50 ... Dhuhr
14:55 ... 'Asr
17:22 ... Maghreb
18:40 ... 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Swelleh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church, Tel. 632705.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590.
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 657440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terrasancta Church Tel: 622366
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 623541.
Anglican Church Tel. 630851. Tel. 628543.
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 652526.
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel: 824328.
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 684195
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazarene Tel.675691.
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman
Tel. 831295

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.

It will be sunny and warm with winds southeasterly moderate. In Aqaba, moderate weather conditions will prevail with winds northerly moderate and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.	
Amman	5/17
Aqaba	9 / 22
Deserts	4 / 18
Jordan Valley	8 / 21

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 16, Aqaba 21 Humidity readings: Amman 30 per cent, Aqaba 31 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Mukhles Halasa ... 819221
Dr. Shabaneh Al Izzah ... 753774
Dr. Shtaiwi Abu Zayed ... 737962
Dr. Khalil Al Tushuq ... 615715
Firas pharmacy ... 661912
Ferdows pharmacy ... 778336
Al Asema pharmacy ... 630055
Nairoukh pharmacy ... 623672
Al Sulam pharmacy ... 636730
Yacoub pharmacy ... 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy ... 637660
Nairouljh pharmacy ... 623672
Najib pharmacy ... 847632

IRBID:
Dr. Ahmad Qanu ... (—)
Alqads pharmacy ... (—)

ZARQA:
Dr. Walid Halasch ... 982799
Khalifeh pharmacy ... 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre ... 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue ... 630341
Civil Defence Emergency ... 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade ... 617101
Blood Bank ... 775121
Highway Police ... 843402
Traffic Police ... 896390
Public Security Department ... 630121
Hotel Complaints ... 605800
Price Complaints ... 661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints ... 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints ... 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) ... 121
Overseas Calls ... 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs ... 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101
Jordan Television ... 773111
Radio Jordan ... 774111
Water Authority ... 680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Company ... 636381
RJ Flight Information ... 08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 813813/32
Khalidi Maternity, J. Amn 644281/6
Akileh Maternity, J. Amn. 642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity ... 642362
Malhas, J. Amman ... 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani ... 664171/4
Shmeisani Hospital ... 669131
University Hospital ... 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital ... 667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali ... 666127/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali ... 664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen ... 777101/3
Al-Bashir, J. Ashrafieh 775111/26
Army, Marka ... 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital ... 602240/50
Amal Hospital ... 674155

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital ... (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital ... (02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital ... (02)247100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital ... (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (08)53200-5, where it should always be verified.

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

05:35 ... Bangkok (RJ)
08:35 ... Jeddah (RJ)
09:00 ... Damascus (RJ)
09:05 ... Larnaca (RJ)
09:55 ... Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:15 ... Beirut (RJ)
10:15 ... Doha, Bahrain, Aqaba (RJ)
17:00 ... New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
17:20 ... Brussels, Paris (RJ)
17:55 ... London (RJ)
18:10 ... Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
18:40 ... Athens (RJ)
20:00 ... Rome (RJ)
20:45 ... Frankfurt, Vienna (RJ)
21:15 ... Vienna (add) (RJ)
01:30 ... Cairo (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

12:35 ... Manama (GF)
14:25 ... Moscow (SU)
20:05 ... Cairo (MS)
20:20 ... Beirut (ME)
22:55 ... Istanbul (TK)
01:10 ... Amsterdam (KL)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

06:25 ... Beirut (RJ)
10:45 ... Aqaba, Vienna (add) (RJ)
11:00 ... Rome (RJ)
11:15 ... Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
11:15 ... Frankfurt, Vienna (RJ)
11:30 ... Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
11:50 ... Athens (RJ)
20:30 ... Jeddah (RJ)
20:45 ... New Delhi (RJ)
20:45 ... Damascus (RJ)
21:00 ... Aqaba, Cairo (RJ)
21:25 ... Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
22:00 ... Singapore, Jakarta (RJ)
22:30 ... Bangkok (RJ)
22:45 ... Sanaa (RJ)
22:45 ... Dhahran (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

07:25 ... Rome (AZ)
13:30 ... Doha, Muscat (GF)
16:05 ... Moscow (SU)
21:00 ... Cairo (MS)
02:20 ... Amsterdam (KL)

HIJAZ RAILWAY TRAIN

Dep. Amman ... 8:00 a.m. every Monday
Arr. Damascus 5:00 p.m. every Monday
Dep. Damascus 7:30 a.m. every Sunday
Arr. Amman ... 5:00 p.m. every Sunday

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in fils per kg.

Apple	700/ 400
Banana	680
Banana (Mukarramar)	620
Cabbage	150 / 100
Carrot	200/120
Cauliflower	100/ 50
Cucumbers (large)	180 / 120
Cucumbers (small)	330 / 170
Eggplant	300/ 200
Garlic	850/450
Grape Fruit	280 / 180
Lemon	250 / 160
Marrow (large)	180 / 100
Marrow (small)	300 / 200
Onion (green)	380/ 240
Onion (dry)	320/ 200
Orange	450/350
Pepper (hot)	1200 / 800
Pepper (sweet)	480 / 320
Potato	330/ 200
Radish	180 / 100
Spinach	100/ 50
String Beans	1000 / 600
Tomato	300/180
Turnip	180 / 120

Princess Basma urges drawing up a pan-Arab strategy on women

AMMAN (Petra) — Her Royal Highness Princess Basma has called for the creation of a pan-Arab information network on women in the Arab World which would help the creation of a pan-Arab strategy on women.

Speaking in an interview with the Abu Dhabi Television via satellite, the Princess said that the United Nations and its specialised agencies have over the past few years started directing attention towards dealing with regional development issues as means of settling regional disputes.

She said that the Arab women are called on to embark on a national pan-Arab strategy designed to help them deal with the development issues and challenges of the coming century.

"The role of women in sustainable development is pivotal, but it is regrettable that the role of Arab women is still marginalised," said the Princess, adding that no real development can be achieved if it does not fulfil the aspirations of all sectors of the public and involve women's participation.

The Princess, who spearheads efforts to improve the statute of women in the Kingdom, through the Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAF), reviewed the different gains and accomplishments of Jordanian women over the past decade and their participation in public life.

Referring to the national strategy on Jordanian women, the Princess said that it has been drawn up to help women carry out their role in social, political and economic arenas.

"We are now in the process of applying the national strategy and we have set up several women committees in various governorates to help implement the various strategy provisions," the Princess said.

Referring to the outcome of the Arab women conference held in Amman last November to prepare for the Beijing conference, the Princess said that the meeting, which was attended by 900 women who took part in 29 workshops, succeeded in accomplishing a pan-Arab plan to be submitted to the Beijing conference

She summed up a general set of priorities aimed at improving the status of Arab women. They include calls for granting women their full rights, on equal terms with men, in public life and decision-making processes, opening of the labour market for women, providing full health services for them and allowing them to participate in the socio-economic development.

QUEEN HOSTS IFTAR — Her Majesty Queen Noor Saturday hosted an iftar banquet at Raghadan Palace for the wives of Arab and Muslim diplomatic corps, the wives of local representatives of international organisations, the wives of government officials and the Administrative Committee of the Business and Professional Women Club. The banquet was also attended by Her Royal Highness Princess Ghida Talal

AI team holds talks with interior minister

AMMAN (J.T.) — A delegation representing the London-based human rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) Saturday met Interior Minister Salameh Hammad and discussed the temporary closure of the organisation's office in Jordan.

The AI last month decided to freeze the Amman office's activities due to internal disputes that led to the collective resignation of its members.

AI said at the time that it had found out that several members of the AI office were trying to dominate and politicise AI work, which totally contravenes the organisation's policy.

Discussion with the minister of interior covered ways to help the AI Jordan's office to resume activities, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra. The agency said that Mr. Hammad briefed the two-member AI team on Jordan's measures vis-a-vis the AI office here, noting that the Ministry of Interior has requested that its members halt their activities and refrain from giving statements to the press or try to pose as AI representatives at regional or international conferences.

Mr. Hammad pledged full Jordanian cooperation with and assistance to AI and its readiness to arrange for AI Amman office to resume operations within the required conditions.

Until its closure, the AI Jordan branch had 300 members divided into 20 different groups and political affiliations.

Recent rain, snowfall helped fill up dams, saved crops, saplings

AMMAN (Petra) — The Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) said Saturday that the Kingdom's dams now hold a total of 85,774,168 cubic metres of rain water collected mostly after the rains of the current winter season.

A JVA statement said that the King Talal Dam alone is now holding nearly 66 million cubic metres, adding that two of the dams, Wadi Shueib and Kafrain, are full to capacity.

Meanwhile, Dr. Mohammad Al Sheikh, director of agricultural production at the Ministry of Agriculture, said in a statement Saturday that the rains and snowfall of the past week had beneficial effects on fruit trees and vegetables while the cold weather accompanying the rain and snow helped somehow eliminate a great deal of pests, like the white fly, in the Jordan Valley region.

Mr. Sheikh said that the rains were timely and saved the cereal crops, coming after a break of more than 40 days of drv weather.

Mr. Sheikh said that the recent rains had saved the tree saplings planted at the beginning of winter

Slovak team due to sign cooperation protocol

AMMAN (Petra) — A delegation from the Federation of Chambers of Trade and Industry in Slovakia is due in Amman later this month for talks with the Jordanian business community on trade and industrial cooperation.

Federation of Jordanian Chambers of Commerce Haydar Murad said that the visiting team will sign with the Jordanian federation a protocol designed to boost trade between Jordan and Slovakia.

The protocol will pave the way to the exchange of visits by business people from the two sides, arrange for joint trade affairs and conferences in addition to concluding trade deals and creating business partnerships, he said.

According to Mr. Murad, the planned protocol, which will be signed during the Slovak delegation's visit starting on Feb. 22, will also cover such issues like the exchange of publications and pamphlets containing information related to trade, marketing of national products and services to businessmen.

He said that the two sides will discuss ways of overcoming obstacles impeding the exchange of goods and economic cooperation.

The Slovak team, which is to be headed by the chairman of the Federation of Chambers of Trade and Industry, will discuss prospects for launching joint industrial ventures and construction of power stations, added Mr. Murad.

He said that the visiting business team will group representatives of major Slovak firms which produce computers, road construction equipment, cranes, agricultural implements, pumps, timber, medical equipment, ceramics and engineering machinery, among others.

He said the Slovak team is interested in concluding long-term agreements with the public sector especially with the Health Ministry, to help carry out therapeutical projects. He said the team will discuss the purchase of Jordanian fertilisers, phosphate and potash.

Loan guarantee firm on aggressive marketing policy

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — A new establishment dedicated to helping small entrepreneurs raise capital through an innovative loan guarantee scheme says it is pursuing an aggressive marketing policy by directly going to potential businessmen.

The Jordan Loan Guarantee Corporation (JLGC), registered as a public shareholding company in July, has so far helped 60 entrepreneurs set up business by guaranteeing loans worth about JD 1.25 million, JLGC Director-General Jamal Salah said Saturday.

"The scheme itself is relatively new to Jordan, and as such we need some more time for people to know what we offer and what the procedures are," said Dr. Salah in an interview with the Jordan Times.

"We are now in the process of organising workshops and seminars for various business groups in Jordan so that people are made aware of our activities and could take advantage of our offer to help them raise capital," he said.

The corporation has a capital of JD 7 million, with the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) contributing JD 3 million and the rest from commercial banks, insurance companies, the Social Security Corporation, the Cities and Villages Development Bank and the Industrial Development Bank (IDB).

Jamal Salah

The CBJ share of the capital came from a $5.5 million (JD 4.2 million) grant extended by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to the IDB in 1989. The reminder of the U.S. aid is being kept as reserves to cover loans extended by the IDB in the same category, Dr. Salah said.

Dr. Salah headed the research department of the Central Bank of Jordan prior to his secondment as director general of the corporation when it was set up.

The CBI took the initiative to set up the corporation after the government decided in August 1993 to move the USAID grant from the IDB to the Central Bank.

"Had it not been for the assistance from USAID, the corporation would not hve come into existence," he said. "The idea to set up the body was always there, but the USAID made it possible to realise it."

The basic philosophy behind the corporation, said Dr. Salah "is to gradually convince the commercial banks to move away from their traditional approach to lending against collaterals and focus more on project feasibility as the determining factor."

"The viability and cash-flow assessment of the project should be the two main factors that guide commercial banks' decision whether to finance a project," Dr. Salah said. "If they insist on physical collateral for every small loan, then many projects would not take off at all."

"There are thousands of entrepreneurs out there who are unable to provide the collateral to the banks and hence their ideas remain on paper," he said. "The corporation makes it possible for them to get loans without collateral."

The corporation offers guarantees from 50 to 75 per cent of the loan amount, with a ceiling of JD 40,000. The rest of the risk is carried by the concerned bank itself in line with its respective policy that might include a stipulation that the beneficiary produce a token part of the capital.

The loans are available for projects in the industrial as well as the services sector in contrast to an earlier policy of restricting lending to industrial units.

Loans for less than JD 20,000, for projects outside Amman and for women entrepreneurs, automatically qualify for 75 per cent coverage, Dr. Salah said.

"This approach serves our purpose of focusing on small businessmen, development of rural areas and encouragement of women to participate in economic activities," he said.

Another key goal of the corporation, he added, is to create job opportunities without having to invest huge amounts.

Dr. Salah said studies indicate that creating a job in a small-scale venture costs about JD 2,500, while it costs JD 6,000 in a medium-size venture and JD 30,000 in large-scale project.

The sole income of the corporation is a 1.5 per cent "guarantee fees" levied from the commercial banks. The levy is calculated on a "ceiling" amount determined by the banks and corporation in individual agreements.

For instance, a bank which has fixed JD 100,000 as the total amount of loans extended by the bank under the corporation's guarantee, pays 1.5 per cent of that amount to the corporation regardless of the amount actually guaranteed.

"Some banks are very active with the facilities that we offer, while others are not," said Dr. Salah. "Obviously those which are inactive need a little bit of time."

"That is why we are pursuing our own aggressive marketing approach," he said. "We are directly knocking at the doors of potential entrepreneurs to advise them how they could make use of us through commercial banks."

So far, the corporation has turned down only two applications out of 60 it received, he said. "The first rejection came because the applicant had a record of defaulting on loans, and the second was because we faced a serious lack of information."

The guarantees are available for professionals like doctors and engineers who want to set up their own ventures, he said. About 10 of the guarantees extended so far benefitted doctors.

Another factor that should help small entrepreneurs is a lower interest rate on the loans because of the iron-clad guarantee provided by the corporation since that reduces the risk carried by the banks.

National oil and gas company to be established; foreign firms offered drilling opportunities

By Amy Henderson
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Drilling opportunities are on offer to foreign oil and gas exploration companies in a bid to rejuvenate exploration efforts in the Kingdom, Director General of the Natural Resources Authority (NRA) Fakhri Daghestani told the Jordan Times. This, coupled with the establishment of a national oil and gas company, to be privatised in the future and now awaiting Cabinet approval, will hopefully give more momentum to exploration, he said.

The creation of the company follows the Council of Ministers' approval, last July, of a recommendation by a ministerial panel to set up a company for oil and gas exploration and exploitation. Theoretically, the company already exists within the structure of the NRA, Dr. Daghestani said.

The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources is waiting for a Cabinet decision, which is expected within the next two months. The rest "is just a shuffle of paperwork," he said, adding that company business could be rolling as soon as June.

Although the NRA is currently responsible for all exploration and drilling operations in the Kingdom, eight foreign companies have drilled in Jordan during the last 30 years under production-sharing arrangements. All, however, pulled out during the last two years, Dr. Daghestani said. The last to leave the Kingdom was Hambo, a Korean company that left in late 1994.

"Recently, Jordan has invited 60 well-known international companies to explore," Dr. Daghestani said. "We will enter into negotiations for production-sharing agreements on a first-come, first-serve basis," he added. Eight companies have responded to the invitation to date. However, Dr. Daghestani would not disclose their names, or the terms on offer.

During the last 30 years only 92 wells have been drilled in Jordan — 16 by foreign companies under production, sharing arrangements and the balance by the NRA in the Azraq, Risheh and Sirhan areas.

Jordan relies on natural gas found in the northeastern Risheh fields, near the Iraqi border, for nearly 15-17 per cent of its electricity needs — nearly six per cent of Jordan's total energy consumption. Drilling in the Risheh area produces 900,000 cubic metres of natural gas per day (equivalent in thermal energy to 450 barrels of oil), the director said. Jordan imports approximately 4 million tonnes of petroleum to fulfill the balance of its energy needs — with a price tag of JD 315 per annum, equivalent to nine per cent of Jordan's gross domestic product or 15 per cent of the total value of imported goods.

Discovery of oil at the Hamzeh field, in Azraq, during the mid-80s allowed for an original production of 600 barrels per day, Dr. Daghestani said, but has diminished to only 25 barrels per day, which means that for all practical purposes, this field is finished. Drilling in the Sirhan area was never productive.

However, Dr. Daghestani told the Jordan Times, these should not discourage continuing drilling. "These areas only cover a total of about 10,000 square kilometres out of a total of 70,000 (square kilometres) which have sedimentary rocks (necessary indicators for oil)," the director said. The only area in the Kingdom actually not suitable for exploration is the Aqaba region, he continued. "This means 60,000 square kilometres are unexplored or under-explored, which gives us an indication that potential still exists and that drilling effort so far has been very slow."

He attributes the slow pace of drilling to the tedious bureaucracy of the NRA, especially in the Petroleum Department which he describes as "unbelievably bureaucratic and tremendously overstaffed."

Dr. Daghestani said he hopes that the decision of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources to establish a state-owned national oil exploration company should speed up the pace of exploration in these unexplored areas.

"Exploration will no doubt be more efficient," he said. "A company will have total freedom in all matters — finance, hiring and firing, securing equipment — because the whole petroleum exploration apparatus of the NRA will be shifted from operation under civil service rules to operation under the companies and labour laws." The bottom line, he said, is that the company will be profit driven.

The question that remains is: Can such a company be profitable and can it reduce the Kingdom's expenditure on imported oil? The fact of the matter, Dr. Daghestani said, is that "no matter if drilling is carried out by the NRA or by a national company, oil exploration is still a hit or miss endeavour — things could really rocket, or we could lose. The classical economic approach does not apply here."

The capital of the company is yet undetermined, but Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Samih Darwazeh said he hoped that profit from natural gas production would be used as venture capital to further oil exploration. All current fixed assets will be transferred to the company.

Dr. Daghestani said he expected that the company would be privatised as quickly as possible. The law stipulates that a national company must produce two annual reports before being offered to private investors, he said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

King congratulates Iran

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein Saturday sent a cable of good wishes to Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on his country's national day. The King wished the Iranian president continued health and happiness and further progress and prosperity to the Iranian people.

Prince Mohammad tours Al al Bayt

MAFRAQ (Petra) — His Royal Highness Prince Mohammad, the personal representative of the King, Saturday visited Al al Bayt University where he was briefed by President Mohammad Al Bakhit on its objectives and philosophy. Prince Mohammad and Dr. Bakhit toured exhibitions currently held at the university to mark its official inauguration which took place Feb. 6.

RSCN plants trees Monday

AMMAN (J.T.) — Under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Noor, the annual tree planting ceremony (arbor day) organised by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) will take place Monday, Feb. 13, 1995, in the Noor Al Hussein forest. This is the sixth forest planted by RSCN. Over the past 10 years, RSCN has planted trees on plots of land donated by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Minister, Omani envoy meet

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Water and Irrigation Saleh Irsheidat Saturday met with Omani Ambassador to Jordan Mohammad Ben Sultan Albusaid. Dr. Irsheidat and the Omani envoy discussed bilateral ties and means of enhancing them, particularly in water-related fields.

Abu Qoura honoured

AMMAN (Petra) — Former president of the Jordan National Red Crescent Society (JNRCS), Ahmad Abu Qoura, Saturday received a medal presented to him by the Qatari Red Crescent Society in appreciation of his services to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movements. The medal was presented to Dr. Abu Qoura at a meeting of the JNRCS's General Assembly held under the chairmanship of current society President Mohammad Al Hadid. Dr. Hadid reviewed at the meeting the society's activities and achievements in 1994.

Jordan to exhibit in Bahrain

AMMAN (Petra) — Agricultural Marketing Organisation (AMO) Director General Salem Lawzi said Saturday that the department had started registering the names of Jordanian exporters of agricultural products wishing to take part in a Jordanian fair due to be held in Bahrain between April 17 and 21. He said that the fair will be the first of its kind to be attended by Jordan in the Gulf region after a break of 10 years. Mr. Lawzi noted that under an agreement with Bahrain, Jordanian exports to the island country are exempt from customs duty.

1,507 merchants fined in Ramadan

AMMAN (Petra) — The Ministry of Supply Saturday announced that Friday its teams have fined 121 merchants, 36 in Amman alone, for violating supply regulations. On the previous day, Thursday, the ministry fined 169 merchants, of whom 85 were in the Amman region. Since the start of Ramadan, the ministry said it fined 1,507 merchants mainly for failing to abide by Ministry of Supply regulations.

Smuggling attempt foiled

AMMAN (Petra) — The Customs Department in Amman announced Saturday that it foiled an attempt at smuggling foreign made cigarettes to Jordan. It said that 1,064 cartons of foreign cigarettes were being smuggled in a vehicle through the free zone in Safawi and the illicit goods were transferred to Amman Customs Department to deal with the case.

Ramadan campaign in Ajloun

AJLOUN (Petra) — The Ramadan charity campaign, which started on Feb. 1, will be launched in the Ajloun area Sunday. At least 200 boy scouts and girl guides will be involved in collecting contributions for the needy in the course of the campaign which is organised by the Queen Alia Fund for social development (QAF).

Iran celebrates anniversary

(Continued from page 12)

streets holding colorful balloons.

The state news agency said a stretch of the march route was so overcrowded "that domestic and foreign cameramen and photographers were not able to register the massive presence of people."

Enjoying a warm, clear day, many took along their children, carrying little green-white-and-red Iranian flags and portraits of Khomeini.

Mr. Rafsanjani told the rally:

"I admit the point that Islam opposes their (the West's) arrogant goals but confrontation against Islam will get them nowhere.

WHAT'S GOING ON

The following listings are compiled from monthly bulletins and the daily Arabic press. Readers are advised to verify the listed time and place with the concerned institutions.

PLAYS

☆ Play (in Arabic) entitled "Ye Who Are Hearing" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 9:00 p.m.

☆ Play (in Arabic) entitled "An Office to Solve Problems" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

FILM

☆ Film entitled "Bird" at the American Center at 2:30 p.m.

SEMINAR

☆ Seminar (in Arabic) entitled "Japan in the Next Ten Years" with the participation of Mr. Abdul Hadi Majali and Mr. Farid Al Sa'd at the Royal Cultural Centre at 9:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

☆ Exhibition of paintings under glass entitled "Oriental Roots" by Fatiha Rahou at the Royal Cultural Centre.

☆ "Young America" exhibit (with photographs featuring Americans of all ages) at the American Center.

☆ Exhibition of works by Qasim Al Samir at the Housing Bank Complex Gallery.

☆ Book exhibition at the Royal Cultural Centre. Also showing another exhibition of Arabic Calligraphy.

☆ Exhibition of the works of Lebanese artist Amin Al Basha at Darat Al Funun. Also showing another exhibition entitled "Phase II-Doors and Windows" by Jordanian artist Ghada Dahdaleh and works by contemporary Arab artists.

☆ Educational works depicting the life of "Voltaire" at the French Cultural Centre.

☆ Exhibition of works by Hala Mahayni at the Petra International Hotel in Aqaba.

Greece rallies support to lift Yugoslavia sanctions

Serb shells hit Bihac

SARAJEVO (R) — Shells hit the U.N.-protected Muslim town of Bihac in northwest Bosnia Saturday on the third day of fighting between Muslim and Serb forces for possession of its water supply.

Muslim-controlled Sarajevo radio said two civilians were killed when two shells slammed into the town close to a base used by a battalion of Bangladeshi peacekeepers.

The U.N. confirmed only one death but blamed Serb forces, from either Bosnia or nearby Croatia, for a deliberate attack on the safe area.

The Bosnian Serb Army has launched a counter offensive south and west of Bihac to recapture ground lost to Muslim-led government troops last month.

The Bihac fighting breaks a Bosnian ceasefire which took effect at New Year and has mostly held across the rest of the country.

Muslim officials in Bihac, reporting to the Sarajevo government by radio, accused the Bosnian Serbs of using tanks and artillery west of the town.

They said government 5th Corps troops were under infantry and artillery assault further north, in the wider Bihac enclave near the town of Velika Kladusa which is held by Serb-backed Muslim rebels opposed to Sarajevo.

Bosnian Serb Army sources also reported fighting around Bihac town and claimed Croatian helicopters had been landing on Muslim-held territory since Friday evening.

The 5th Corps is completely surrounded by Serbs and rebel Muslims and can only be resupplied by air.

Although the Bihac fighting has been contained locally so far, the U.N. fears that it could destabilise the wider ceasefire if it continues or intensifies.

Neither the rebel Muslims nor Croatian Serbs from the neighbouring self-styled Republic of Serb Krajina, who are allied with them, are part of the truce agreement.

The Serbs and rebels also keep the U.N. at arms length, making it difficult for the peacekeepers to monitor what is going on accurately.

Officials of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) denied a claim by the commander of the Bosnian government army that people in Bihac were starving to death under a Serb blockade of international aid.

They acknowledged that food shortages were serious but said they had seen no deaths from starvation.

Croatian Serb Prime Minister Borislav Mikelic said in a newspaper interview that his forces would not start a war with Zagreb if U.N. peacekeepers were withdrawn from Croatia but would defend themselves if attacked.

"We won't be the first to use force but, if forced, we will know how to respond," he told the Serbian daily Dnevnik.

Zagreb has ordered the 12,000 peacekeepers in Croatia to pack up and leave within three months of the expiry of their mandate on March 31.

Most are deployed within the self-declared Krajina Serb Republic set up on Croatian territory captured during Zagreb's war for independence from Yugoslavia in 1991.

Although the U.N. does not recognise the republic and accepts that its territory belongs to Zagreb, the Croatia government believes the peacekeepers' presence provides Krajina Serb leaders with an excuse to avoid a political settlement.

Despite foreign criticism and warnings of renewed war Croatian President Franjo Tudjman insisted Friday that U.N. peacekeepers will have to leave Croatia after their mandate expires on March 31.

Senior U.N. and Western officials have warned Mr. Tudjman that throwing out the U.N. troops could lead to renewed fighting in Croatia. The three-year-old U.N. mission helped end a 1991 war that cost at least 10,000 lives.

Mr. Tudjman ordered the peacekeepers out because he believes they have failed in their key missions of returning refugees to their homes and reintegrating about a third of Croatian territory now controlled by rebel Serbs.

Speaking to reporters Friday, Mr. Tudjman said he would allow international observers along Croatia's borders if a political agreement is reached with the rebel Serbs. The observers would help ease the reintegration of Serb-held territory into Croatia proper, he said.

Earlier this week, the Croatian Serbs froze economic negotiations with Mr. Tujdman's government in response to its decision to end the U.N. peacekeeping mission.

Mediators had hoped the economic talks could lead to a broader political deal. But when they presented one last week, the Croatian Serbs refused to discuss it unless the peacekeepers were allowed to stay.

Mr. Tudjman predicted Friday there would be no outbreak of war once the peacekeepers withdraw.

"There will be no war, but there might be isolated incidents," he said. Croatia made the move hoping it would "speed up the peace process in former Yugoslavia."

Mr. Tudjman acknowledged that the attitude of Serbia's powerful President Slobodan Milosevic was critical to getting the Croatian Serbs to accept peace.

Mr. Milosevic has cooled his support for Serbs in both Croatia and Bosnia, and Bosnian Serbs already have said they would fight on the side of their Croatian brethren in case of a renewed conflict with Croatia.

Meanwhile, Greece has rallied support from Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Hungary for moves to get U.N. sanctions against the rump Yugoslavia lifted, Greek Foreign Minister Carolos Papoulias said Friday.

Emerging from talks in this northern Greek port city with his Yugoslav counterpart Vladislav Jovanovic, Mr. Papoulias said Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev had also expressed interest in a joint motion to ask the U.N. Security Council to lift the sanctions imposed in late 1991.

Miss Texas crowned Miss USA 1995

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND, Texas (AFP) — A 21-year-old Texas student, Chelsi Smith, was crowned Miss USA 1995 and will represent the United States at the Miss Universe contest later this year in Namibia. Ms. Smith also won $207,000. The runner-up was Shanna Lynn Moakler, a 19-year-old model from New York. The Miss USA contest is unrelated to the more prestigious Miss America beauty pageant. The photograph shows Miss USA 1994 La Parker (left), crowns Ms. Smith as Miss USA 1995 (centre), while Miss Teen USA 1994 Shanna Gambill presents roses (AFP photo)

Never again says Mandela of Robben Island jail

CAPE TOWN (R) — South African President Nelson Mandela, celebrating with 1,300 other former inmates the fifth annivesary of his release from political imprisonment, on Saturday vowed: "Never, never again."

After a jubilant welcome by former prisoners of the Robben Island political jail in Cape Town's Table Bay, Mr. Mandela said his country's history of racism and resistance was "a towering monument of lessons for the future."

"We are here also to declare with confidence and conviction: Never, never again shall South Africa imprison its citizens simply because they disagree with the government of the day.

"The time for freedom, human rights, democracy and openness has come to pass," he said in an opening address to a conference on the future of the prison island, where he had spent nearly a quarter of his life.

Mr. Mandela, 76, made no specific recommendation for the island which has a nature reserve and lighthouse station and still houses about 760 ordinary criminals, but said any decision should... "respect the feelings of those who hold the island sacred."

He announced the formation of a presidential commission to gather suggestions and advise him on options for the low 2.5 square mile (6.5 square kilometre) island of sand and scrub.

"The recommendations will be submitted to the president for a final decision," he said.

Mr. Mandela made an emotional return to the island Friday, visiting the white lime quarry where thousands of political offenders broke rocks in the harsh African sunlight.

He embraced former prison colleagues, shook hands with white warders and had lunch with fellow veterans in a tent on the beach that was off limits to them as prisoners.

"When we were daily stripped naked in the biting winter cold, when we were tortured, when we were forced to break stones at the quarry — never for a moment did we allow this to break our spirits," Mr. Mandela said Saturday.

"From the darkness of the prison cells, we knew there was light and a greater truth that no prison walls could hold back: The quest for freedom by the millions in our country and abroad."

Mr. Mandela's release from a mainland prison on Feb. 11, 1990, triggered four years of negotiations that led last year to the country's first all-race vote and Mr. Mandela's election as South Africa's first black president.

He was jailed in 1964 for life after being found guilty of treason charges. He spent 18 of his 27 years in South African prisons on Robben Island.

On Saturday he said the black majority, denied a vote throughout the colonial history that began with a Dutch settlement in 1652, should be cautious in claiming the rights of democracy.

"In the final analysis, the greatest token of redress that all of us can get is the successful reconstruction and development of our country.

"The energy we mustered to survive the difficult conditions of prison should be put to good use in the effort to build a better life for all our people," he said.

Mr. Mandela, who will open the second legislative session of his parliament Friday, set no deadline for a decision on the future of Robben Island, which can be visited at present only with a government permit.

Canada by-election seen as signal on Quebec future

OTTAWA (R) — The outcome of a by-election in Quebec, one of three being held Modnay to fill vacant seats in Canada's parliament, will send a signal on the fate of the latest drive for Quebec independence, political analysts said.

Opinion polls show the ruling Liberal Party and the Quebec separatist Bloc Quebecois running neck-and-neck in the vote in the district of Brome-Missisquoi to replace a member who died.

"Personally I believe the liberals are going to win, but it is very close," said University of Montreal political scientist Louis Massicotte.

The vote will test support for Quebec independence. The separatist movement is represented in the federal parliament by the Bloc Quebecois and in Quebec by the provincial Parti Quebecois.

The Bloc Quebecois swept into parliament in the 1993 election, winning 54 seats to make it the official federal opposition.

The Parti Quebecois took power from the Liberals in the French-speaking province last year with a firm promise to hold a referendum on separation sometime later this year.

Monday's by-election has become a proxy for the upcoming referendum, with the tightness of the race mirroring the split in support for and against separation.

"It shows that in the pre-referendum period there is a polarisation. Things are becoming more black and white," Mr. Massicotte said.

A recent poll published in a French-language weekly in the district, La Voix De L'Est (Voice of the East), shows the Bloc Quebecois candidate Jean-Francois Bertrand with 33.8 per cent of voter support. His father was once premier of the province.

Liberal candidate and former Quebec Bar Association President Denis Paradis had 31.0 per cent backing in the poll.

The rest of the vote is shared by several small parties.

But most telling is the 23 per cent who said they remained undecided, meaning the final vote could swing either way.

Political scientists said that a defeat for the Bloc Quebecois would break the momentum the separatists need before the Quebec referendum, which according to recent newspaper reports could be held as early as June.

In a 1980 referendum Quebeckers voted 59.6 per cent against starting the process towards independence from Canada.

But failed attempts to reform Canada's constitution have kept support for separation alive.

The Bloc Quebecois also needs to win this by-election to fend off the Reform Party, another new protest party in Ottawa, that now has only one seat fewer than the Bloc and desperately wants to become the official opposition.

The three by-elections are the first electoral test for the federal Liberals under Prime Minister Jean Chretien since he and his party crushed the Conservative Party in October 1993.

For the Liberals it is a chance to prove they can regain support among French-speakers in Quebec, outside of their English-speaking bastions in Montreal and the Ottawa region.

A victory for the Liberals would give them another well-known Quebec voice in parliament supporting the cause of keeping Canada together.

Shuttle lands in Florida after Mir encounter

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida (R) — Five astronauts and a cosmonaut landed in Florida aboard the U.S. shuttle Discovery early Saturday after eight historic days off the planet on a mission to rendezvous with Russia's space station Mir.

Shuttle Commander James Wehterbee, a U.S. Navy aviator, brought Discovery at the Kennedy Space Centre 6:50 a.m. est (1150 GMT) on a concrete runway at the Kennedy Space Centre (KSC) in Florida. Eileen Collins, the first woman shuttle pilot, was not at the controls because it is National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) policy to have mission commanders land the shuttle.

Discovery and its crew — including veteran cosmonaut Vladimir Titov — were returning from what NASA described as one of the most demanding of all 67 shuttle missions to date.

"Welcome home and congratulations on an outstanding mission. You all did a terrific job up there," mission control's Brent Jett radioed the crew from Houston as the shuttle roled to a stop after a journey of 3 million miles, or 130 orbits.

The flight began to merge the human space programmes of the United States and Russia it set the stage for future shuttles to dock at Mir to deliver passengers and equipment. Seven such missions are planned before late 1997, when the two nations aim to begin building a new, $40 billion space station with the help of Canada, Europe and Japan.

Com. Wetherbee and Collins fired Discovery's braking rockets at 5:44 a.m. est (1144 GMT), slowing the shuttle's 17,500 mph (28,000 kph) orbital pace just enough for gravity to grab the craft and drag it back to earth.

"KSC, here we come," Com. Whetherbee said.

The winged ship U.S. landfall at 6:27 a.m est (1127 GMT) just south of Seattle. It blazed a path through the predawn skies over Denver, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Memphis, Tennessee, and Birmingham, Alabama, on its 23-minute trek across the continent.

Discovery announced its presence near the Kennedy Spaceport with twin sonic booms that rattled windows and roused sleepers from their beds just after daybreak.

It was not immediately clear whether Com. Whetherbee held true to NASA tradition and permitted Collins to handle the controls briefly as the shuttle began its cross-country approach to Florida's central east coast. But he was in command when Discovery's tyres met the pavement.

Collins' stint in the pilot's seat puts her in line for possible assignment to a future mission as the world's first woman space shuttle commander.

Mexican army officer killed as soldiers move into rebel territory

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, Mexico (AP) — Soldiers have moved unopposed into the town at the centre of a year-old rebellion, but an army officer and two policemen were killed carrying out President Ernesto Zedillo's crackdown on the guerrillas.

Lt. Col. Hugo Alfredo Manterola Cedillo, 48, was killed Friday when a gunman fired on a small convoy outside the village of Nuevo Momon, near Guadalupe Tepeyac, the de facto rebel capital in Chiapas state.

The gunman fled, and a statement from the attorney general's office said it wasn't known whether he was a Zapatista rebel.

Two officers were killed in a raid on a rebel safe house in Mexico state Thursday night.

Hours after the Nuevo Momon shooting, soldiers entered Guadalupe Tepeyac without resistance. Guerrillas of the Zapatista National Liberation Army apparently had withdrawn into the jungle without risking a fight.

Armoured vehicles moved through Las Margaritas, on the edge of the sparsely populated canyon country that the insurgents claim. Troops turned back reporters who followed them beyond the town.

In all, the army has entered 11 villages and communities in Mexico's poorest state.

Rebel sympathisers said the troop movements could lead to open battle, ending a ceasefire that has kept the rebellion in Chiapas quiet for the past year.

Until now the army stayed out of rebel territory, with the government pinning its hopes on peace talks. But the talks produced no agreement, and Mr. Zedillo was under pressure to act and rally Mexico's battered peso and stock market after heavy losses triggered in part by rebel activity.

Mr. Zedillo said he would call a special session of Congress on the uprising and would submit legislation to grant amnesty to rebels who laid down their arms.

The president Thursday ordered the arrest of rebel spokesman Subcomandante Marcos and five other rebel leaders.

Com. Marcos' whereabouts were not known, but three of the other five have been arrested.

The attorney general's office said it peacefully arrested a man it identified as one of the top six rebel commanders, Jorge Santiago Santiago, in the Chiapas town of Teopisca. Mr. Santiago, 50, denied any links to the Zapatista rebels, and told reporters that he did not know Com. Marcos — who has been identified by the government as Rafael Sebastian Guillen Vicente, 37.

The government also arrested Jorge Javier Elorreaga, who it claims is the rebel leader known as Subcomandante Vicente, and his wife, Maria Gloria Benavides.

Mr. Elorreaga denied in court in the state capital of Tuxtla Gutierrez Friday that he was Subcomandante Vicente, and said he had only met Com. Marcos briefly.

27 other rebel suspects have been arrested in Chiapas, Mexico and Veracruz states, authorities said.

Two police officers were killed and three wounded when police raided a Zapatista safe house Thursday night on the outskirts of Toluca, capital of the state of Mexico, which borders Mexico City to the west.

Fourteen people were arrested in the raid, and police said they found a dozen automatic firearms, a shotgun and ammunition. The attorney general's office said the house had been used to make uniforms for the rebels, and that it had a small underground tunnel for target practice.

In Mexico City, the federal district attorney released statements said to have been made by people arrested on suspicion of being rebels.

One suspect, Maria Gloria Benavides Guevara, told a judge at her arraignment Friday that her statement had been falsified. She said it had been given while she was blindfolded and that she had signed it under pressure, without being allowed to read it.

That statement said the group had religious instructors involved in its activities since 1985 and that the bishop of San Cristobal De Las Casas, Monsignor Samuel Ruiz, had known about the rebel movement since at least 1990.

Prosecutors claimed she said Bishop Ruiz had tried to talk the rebels out of a violent uprising five months before the insurrection began on Jan. 1, 1994. At least 145 people were killed before a ceasefire took hold 12 days later.

A spokesman for Bishop Ruiz's diocese declined comment on the claim. Bishop Ruiz acted as a mediator in government-rebel talks.

In Washington, the State Department urged Mexico to exercise restraint in the Chiapas operation but said the action will not damage bilateral relations.

Republican presidential race shapes up with Dole-Gramm vying for top spot

WASHINGTON (Agencies) — Dan Quayle's decision to skip the 1996 presidential race leaves Senator Bob Dole and Phil Gramm as the new campaign landscape.

Mr. Quayle, who was vice president from 1989 to 1993 under George Bush, made the surprise announcement Thursday, joining a list of at least three other candidates who bowed out after they failed to win backing from major campaign contributors.

His exit prompted Mr. Gramm, a hardline conservative from Texas, to quickly move in on Quayle supporters, many of whom are Christian fundamentalists bent on bringing morality issues back into U.S. politics.

But according to a CNN-USA Today poll, the withdrawal of Mr. Quayle from the race provides a boost to Sen. Dole, who reportedly has won the backing of 45 per cent of Republicans compared to 8 per cent for Mr. Gramm.

Sen. Dole, who was first elected to Senate 30 years ago and became majority leader following the Republican landslide in November, is considered a middle-of-the-road conservative who is open to compromise.

The poll also indicated that voter support was stronger for Sen. Dole than for Bill Clinton with 51 per cent of those surveyed saying they would vote for Sen. Dole if an election were held today compared to 44 per cent who chose Mr. Clinton.

Mr. Gramm, who has pieced together a platform appealing mostly to the party's right wing, would appear to be less of a formidable adversary to Mr. Clinton than Sen. Dole but that could change as the GOP struggles with internal divisions.

Republicans, emboldened by their success in the November midterm elections, nevertheless face serious challenges in preserving party unity over contentious issues such as abortion.

White House spokesman Michael McCurry predicted Friday that abortion foes were poised to play a key role in the Republican nomination as anti-abortion extremists gain momentum in the ranks of the GOP.

Divisions in the party could weaken the Republican position ahead of the 1996 presidential poll and would play in Clinton's favour.

Aside from Sen. Dole and Mr. Gramm, former education secretary Lamar Alexander has announced plans to seek the Republican nomination while others are mulling over their decision.

These include Governors Pete Wilson from California, William Weld from Massachusetts, Tommy Thompson from Wisconsin as well as Senators Richard Lugar from Indiana, Arlen Specter from Pennsylvania and political commentator Pat Buchanan.

Former Secretary of State James Baker is also said to be considering nomination.

But Mr. Gramm and Sen. Dole already have a strong advantage over possible rivals, financial backing.

Love letters to Juliet win prizes in Verona

ROME (R) — She and Romeo may have met a tragic end 400 years ago in Shakespeare's play but the bard's young heroine Juliet continues to inspire lovers around the world. A group of Italians based in Verona, the northern Italian city where Shakespeare set the story of the star-crossed lovers, awarded prizes for the most romantic love letter to Juliet the amorous noblewoman. According to the Juliet Club, a cultural association dedicated to keeping her spirit alive, letters from lovers filled with joy, pain, confusion and regret have been flooding in since 1937. They are addressed, simply, to: Juliet, Verona. "They come in all languages — Turkish, Chinese, Japanese — so we often have to call on interpreters to help us answer them," said Susanna Mariotti, who has organised the third annual "Dear Juliet" Competition, which is sponsored by the city. She said that in addition to the lovers' epistles, Juliet regularly received wedding invitations and Valentine's Day cards. Countless lovers and Juliet fans visit what local tradition says is her tomb and the house where she grew up. Over the past 50 years Romeo's lover has received over 20,000 letters and this year alone, her mailbox overflowed with some 4,500 of them. Ms. Mariotti told Reuters a committee of volunteers — mostly women — send personal, hand-written responses to each missive. "They sign them 'Juliet's secretary,'" she said. The award, a simple silver medallion, was shared this year by a French World War II veteran and a young woman science student from the town of Rovigo near Verona.

Woman shortage looms in China

WASHINGTON (AFP) — There will be a million more young men of marriageable age than women in China by 2020 because of the policy of limiting children to one per family and the traditional preference for males, a U.S. study has concluded. The gender gap could profoundly affect Chinese society, said Marcus Feldman, a researcher at Stanford University and author of the demographic study published Friday by the U.S. journal Science. "Sex selection is illegal, but it still goes on," Mr. Feldman said. "Infanticide traditionally happens in China, but how often that goes on now is difficult to say." Modern techniques that make it possible to determine the sex of a foetus such as amniocentesis and ultrasound, are used in China to decide on abortions, the researcher said. The scarcity of women could mean that men from families of modest means will find it more difficult to find a mate, he said. It may also lead to a growth in prostitution in the country, he said.

Gendarmes are show stoppers for car bonnet lovers

LE HAVRE, France (AFP) — Suspicious gendarmes who went to investigate a crowd of people in the dead of night on a lonely country road found a married couple having sex on their car bonnet cheered on by 15 voyeurs. The gendarme patrol ordered coitus interruptus close to the village of Saint-Vigor-d'Ymonville near here and charged the couple with public indecency. The couple said it was not their first "show" — which they carried out gratis — and the wife said she did it only to please her husband, gendarmes quoted them as saying. The couple was freed after being held for questioning.

Car logo thieves nabbed in Shanghai

SHANGHAI (R) — Two Shanghai teenagers who amassed a collection of 110 logos stolen from Cadillacs, Toyota Lexus and Crown Sedans and Mercedes limousines have been arrested, the Liberation Daily said Tuesday. The two 18-year-old students began looting logos in October last year, adding to a spate of similar crimes in the city, the paper said. Each logo costs 2,000 yuan ($237) to 8,000 yuan ($948) to replace, it added.

هكذا من الأصل

Balladur under fire for student U-turn

PARIS (R) — France's conservative Prime Minister Edouard Balladur came under fire Saturday for bowing to student protests, with his political opponents saying he was not fit to be voted president in coming elections.

Shown by polls to be hot favourite to succeed French President Francois Mitterrand in May, Mr. Balladur said Friday he had suspended new rules tightening admission to universities. The changes were criticised by students at France's 90 technology institutes as limiting their access to university.

Opponents on left and right denounced Mr. Balladur for backing down after a week of student protests in towns across France, saying it illustrated confusion and dithering in Mr. Balladur's government.

Jean Glavany, spokesman of the Socialist Party, said the suspension was a "spectacular proof of (Balladur's) inability to hold high office" and that it showed he had "neither wisdom nor calm nor authority."

"What seems worrying for the future is the method of government," said Jean-Francois Mancel, a parliamentarian who supports Mr. Balladur's main conservative rival for the presidency, Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac.

Mr. Balladur's method "consists in making errors through lack of discussion and then, after taking one step forward, taking two steps back," he said.

Mr. Balladur said Friday that the students were protesting because of a misunderstanding about new rules, affecting 100,000 students at so-called university technology institutes, which give two-year courses ranging from business studies to physics.

He says his style is to reform without confrontation.

Several thousand students protested Friday in cities including Nantes, Grenoble, Toulouse, Montpellier and Paris.

They said they planned new actions next Thursday, saying Mr. Balladur should scrap the rule rather than merely suspend it.

Mr. Balladur has often been criticised for caving in too easily during his 23 months in power to street protests by groups ranging from students to fishermen.

Education Minister Francois Fillon would meet students, teachers and heads of the technology institutes Tuesday to discuss the dispute.

"Either our circular is badly phrased, and we'll correct it, or there are people who are deliberately deforming the message with obvious political aims," he told France Info radio.

Edouard Balladur

An opinion poll due in the weekly magazine Le Point Saturday showed Mr. Balladur would beat Mr. Chirac by 60-40 per cent margin and defeat Socialist candidate Lionel Jospin 58-42 per cent.

Top defector says Khmer Rouge turning desperate, more hardline

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — Military hardliners have taken full control of the Khmer Rouge as it reels from a rash of defections, according to accounts Saturday of briefings by the most senior official to quit the movement since 1979.

Interior Minister Sar Kheng told AFP that the defector, Sar Kim Lamouth, had been secretly briefing government officials on the state of the Khmer Rouge since November.

Mr. Sar Kim Lamouth had been in charge of the guerrillas' finances and was currently in a "safe house" somewhere in Cambodia, he said.

Reports of the debriefing sessions with government officials said Mr. Sar Kim Lamouth had highlighted the increasing desperation of Khmer Rouge leaders in dealing with a wave of defections in recent months.

The Phnom Penh Post quoted sources who have spoken to Mr. Sar Kim Lamouth as saying Khmer Rouge leaders were particularly distressed over the Thai government's closure of its border with Cambodia.

Moreover hardline military commanders are reported to have gained the upper hand in the group.

"We are not talking any more about a political solution, only armed struggle," the paper quoted the defector as saying.

But, the report went on to say that many Khmer Rouge rank-and-file no longer have the heart to continue fighting.

The group is firmly under the control of Pol Pot, architect of the radical policies of the 1970s that left more than a million dead, and General Ta Mok.

"Moderates" such as nominal leader Khieu Samphan have had their power stripped, the paper quoted Mr. Sar Kim Lamouth as saying.

Haiti to hold elections in May or June

PORT-AU-PRINCE (AP) — Legislative and local elections — a key test of Haiti's return to democracy — will be held in late May or early June, an election official said Friday.

The need to hold elections is pressing because the terms of almost every elected official — from senators to town councilors expired Feb. 4. Until the elections, there is a political power vacuum in Haiti.

The five-year term of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, reinstated Oct. 15 by U.S. soldiers after three years of army rule, expires in February 1996.

Local and legislative elections had been set for December but were delayed by the tumult surrounding Mr. Aristide's return and parliamentary wrangling over an elections bill.

Marie-Laurence Jocelyn Lassegue, secretary-general of the nine-member Electoral Council, told the Associated Press that elections would be held by the end of May or early June.

The exact date will be fixed once Mr. Aristride publishes an election law, sent to him last week by parliament, in the official state gazette. Lesilie Voltaire, Mr. Aristide's chief of staff, said the law will be published early next week.

U.S. to sign U.N. child treaty in honour of UNICEF's Grant

NEW YORK (R) — First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton has announced the United States would sign the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child in honour of UNICEF's late director, James Grant.

Mrs. Clinton, attending a memorial service for Mr. Grant, who died on Jan. 28, said: "I am pleased to announce that the United States will sign the United Nations convention on the rights of the child."

"Nobody fought harder for it than Jim Grant and this convention to protect the rights of children through the world. We owe it to him and to the children to whom he dedicated his life."

She told guests at the service, held at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, that President Bill Clinton had instructed Secretary of State Warren Christopher to take the necessary steps Thursday. U.S. Ambassador Madeleine Albright will sign the convention next week.

The convention, initiated by Mr. Grant, became international law in September 1990 and sets universally accepted standards to protect children. It also deals with neglect and abuse which children face in all countries and draws attention to children explosed to economic and sexual exploitation.

Because the convention also deals with education, adoption and child welfare, which in the United States are primary the responsibility of the states, President George Bush decided not to sign the treaty.

Mr. Grant, an American who was head of UNICEF for 15 years, died of cancer last month. His directorship brough the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) international admiration.

He was a pioneer in recognising revolutions in the drug and health industry and promoted simple, low-cost methods for child welfare — immunisation, oral rehydration and breastfeeding — that could be instituted throughout the world's poorest countries.

Report: Washington plans bigger naval, air force role in Korea

SEOUL (AP) — Washington wants to focus more on its air and naval strength to deter war threats from North Korea, a newspaper reported Saturday.

A contingent of about 37,000 U.S. troops with sophisticated weaponry backs up South Korean forces as they face the Communist North's army of 1 million in the cold war's last major military standoff.

The Joong-Ang Daily News, quoting a draft of Washington's new Asia-Pacific military plans, said Washington has decided to keep the current level of military forces here because a conventional military threat from North Korea still exists.

Washington plans to add to its naval and air force strength and intelligence-gathering capability as a deterrence while allowing South Korean ground forces to play a bigger role, it said.

Officials at South Korea's Defence Ministry acknowledged the existence of a U.S. draft plan but refused to discuss it, saying negotiations are continuing and the plan is far from final.

But the news report said the South Korean military is unhappy with the changes, fearing they might hamper Seoul's efforts to strengthen its own navy and air force, and create an "unbalanced military."

Washignton also asked Seoul to pay more for the costs of maintaining the U.S. forces in South Korea, the newspaper said.

U.S. officials have said Washington wants to lower the profile of the American military here, shifting to a support role in defending South Korea.

In the first of a three-stage force-reduction programme, the United States withdraw 7,000 troops by 1991. The second stage, calling for another 6,500 troops to be pulled out by the end of 1993, was suspended during nuclear negotiations with Pyongyang.

The 17-month-old nuclear standoff was defused by a landmark U.S.-North Korea deal last October, in which the North agreed to freeze and eventually dismantle its nuclear programme in return for economic aid and diplomatic ties.

But tensions remain high on the Korean peninsula, with both sides slandering each other and amassing nearly 2 million troops around the border, the world's most heavily armed.

Meanwhile, North Korean negotiators returned home Saturday after stalemated talks with Washington on getting two modern nuclear reactors from the West, the North's official media reported.

A brief dispatch by the Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) did not comment on the results of the talks deadlocked over the North's refusal to accept South Korean-designed reactors. Washington has warned that the North's recalcitrance could scuttle their landmark nuclear deal signed lat October.

Under the deal, North Korea was promised two light-water reactors in return for closing down its graphite reactors that produce far more plutonium, which could be diverted to arms use.

South Korea is willing to pay the bulk of the $4 billion cost of the reactor project but says it will do so only when its model is adopted.

North Korea, which fought a war with South Korea in 1950-53, resents the prominent role given its neighbour in executing the agreement.

North Korean negotiators met with U.S. representatives in Berlin last week and are to meet again in March at a location not yet chosen.

The Japanese and South Korean foreign ministers agreed in Tokyo Saturday that the two Koreas should pursue talks in tandem with the North's nuclear deal with the United States, the Kyodo News Agency said.

U.S. House passes $10.5 b prison bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House of Representatives Friday passed a crime bill that boosts federal funds for state prisons but denies them to states that don't put and keep more violent criminals behind bars.

The Republican-controlled House also passed, 380-20, legislation to deport criminal aliens more quickly after they get out of prison.

The two bills are Nos. 4 and 5 in a six-part package, part of the Republican Party's "Contract With America" programme, which aims to remold a 1994 anti-crime law. President Bill Clinton suggested this week he might veto bills that dismantle key elements of last year's law.

The prison measure passed by 265 votes to 156.

It raises funding for new prisons to $10.5 billion, $2.6 million more than authorised in the crime package passed by the Democratic-controlled Congress last year. In return, states would be required to impose stricter sentences.

Half the $10.5 billion would be given only to states with so-called "truth-in-sentencing" laws requiring serious violent felons to serve at least 85 per cent of their sentences. The other half would go only to those states that increase the percentage of violent convicts sent to prison and increase the average time they serve behind bars.

The House adopted, by voice vote, a Republican amendment that would allow states to use up to 15 per cent of the prison grants for building short-term jails, provided they require people charged with violent felonies to post bond to be released before trial.

Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, the senior Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, called the provision "a disturbing proposal."

"What if the person doesn't have cash? What if the person doesn't have any previous convictions?" Mr. Conyers asked fellow lawmakers.

The criminal alien deportation bill would streamline the deportation process and expand the scope of crimes for which aliens can be deported.

Under current law, aliens who commit aggravated felonies can be deported. The bill would enlarge the definition of an aggravated felony to include transporting people for prostitution; serious bribery, counterfeiting or forgery; serious trafficking in stolen vehicles; trafficking in counterfeit immigration documents and obstruction of justice, perjury or bribing witnesses.

Earlier this week, the House passed bills that would require criminals to pay full restitution to their victims for damages, impose a one-year limit for death row inmates to file appeals to federal courts, and expand the authority of courts to use evidence that is illegally obtained.

In a related development, House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich said the United States should focus its post-cold war security concerns on terrorism, particularly Islamic regimes such as Iran's.

"I cannot overstate the potential dangers that Iran represents," Mr. Gingrich said, defending earlier statements supporting the overthrow of the Tehran government.

Ecuador downs 2 Peruvian planes

U.S. halts arms sales to Quito, Lima

OBSERVATION POST ONE, Peru (Agencies) — Struggling against dysentery, mosquitoes and knee-deep mud, Peru's soldiers are as much at war with the Amazon jungle as with the Ecuadorean adversaries they can't see through the thick tree cover.

The Peruvians are fighting uphill, trying to dislodge Ecuador's troops who are dug into the steep green mountainsides of the remote border strip over which the two countries went to war two weeks ago.

"It's difficult to see the Ecuadoreans through the vegetation. We know where to shoot by where their fire comes from," said 18-year-old soldier Edilmar Becera Sanchez.

Observation Post One, a cluster of shacks roofed with palm-leaf and tin, has come under moratar attack five times. The latest attack Friday left four craters 3 feet (a metre) deep in the muddy bank of the Cenepa River.

Each side accuses the other of starting the fighting over the unmarked, 48-mile (77 kilometres) stretch of border in the Cordillerea Del Condor Mountains on the eastern edge of the Andes. The area is 600 miles (965 kilometres) north of Lima and 220 miles (354 kilometres) southeast of Quito, Ecuador's capital.

No progress was reported Friday in peace talks in Brasilia, the Brazilian capital.

In Quito, Ecuadorean officials issued a statement calling on former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, to mediate the dispute.

The statement did not make clear if Mr. Arias and Mr. Carter had offered their services. There was no immediate response from Peru, or from Mr. Carter and Mr. Arias.

Ecuadorean officials also said Friday that land and air attacks by both sides had intensified. They said they shot down two Peruvian planes. There was no confirmation from Peru.

Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori said that 16 Peruvian warplanes attacked the Ecuadorean post of Tiwintza.

Gen. Vladimiro Lopez Trigoso, commander of the Peruvian force, said it's taking longer than expected to force Ecuador's forces out of Tiwintza and other areas.

"We advance a metre per hour," said Gen. Lopez Trigoso.

But he blamed the jungle, not Ecuadorean resistance, for the pace of the fighting.

At least 36 Peruvian soldiers and 11 Ecuadoreans have been killed. Peru says it has suffered 60 wounded, while Ecuador admits 28 wounded.

Only 40 per cent of those treated at the Emergency Field Hospital set up at the main base in Bagua, 450 miles (725 kilometres) north of Lima, are combat wounds.

The rest are treated for everything from blisters and irritating skin fungus to dysentery and hepatitis, said the hospital's civilian director, Dr. Luis Rubio.

The trip out of the Cenepa headwaters for medical help is an arduous two-day hike just to cover the 5 or 6 miles (8 or 9 kilometres) to Observation Post One for basic treatment at a makeshift clinic.

To reach a hospital requires an additional 90-minute trip by helicopter, mostly over unbroken jungle, to Bagua.

Lt. Romel Alvarado, wounded in the leg by a grenade, said from his hospital bed that this fighting was worse than his experience against the Shining Path guerrillas who have waged a Maoist-inspired insurgency against Peru.

"With the subversives it was face to face," said Lt. Alvarado, 29. "But the Ecuadoreans shoot, then run and they have mortar support. Immediately they bomb us. It's ambushing."

The United States Friday halted government arms sales to Ecuador and Peru and suspended licences for private sector sales in what officials called a political move to push the countries to stop their border war.

The U.S. State Department, announcing the ban on what officials admitted were minimal sales to the two South American nations, said it understood that Argentina, Brazil and Chile were following suit.

"In response to the continuing conflict on the border between Ecuador and Peru, the United States government has suspended deliveries of defence articles through the U.S. foreign military sales programme," it said.

The statement, issued by department spokeswoman Christine Shelly, said U.S. military training programmes in Ecuador and Peru had been called off, that licences for private sector arms sales had been suspended and no new ones would be issued.

U.S. officials said the practical effect of the ban on government arms sales would be limited. They said there was nothing in the current military sales budget for Ecuador and only a $325,000 allocation for training in Peru.

Last year, military sales to Ecuador totalled just over $5 million, plus $415,000 for equipment used against drug trafficking, while nothing was sold to Peru, according to official figures.

Officials and private experts said there could be more of an impact on commercial sales, especially of small arms. Ecuador and Peru "could be looking for things like handguns," said Sarah Walkling of the Private Arms Control Association.

No figures for private sector sales were immediately available.

In the past, the United States has sold aircraft, helicopters, Howitzers and armoured personnel carriers to both countries, but officials said much of this was of Vietnam War or earlier vintage. Peru's main battle armament is Soviet-made, including several hundred T-54 and T-55 tanks.

"In the short term, this move is more psychological and political than anything else," said one U.S. official who asked not to be identified.

"We're showing our displeasure. This is a signal that we want political cooperation."

7 die as test plane crashes in Ukraine

KIEV (R) — A midair collision caused the crash of an experimental cargo aircraft on a test flight, killing its seven crew, a Ukrainian government statement said Saturday.

The sole working prototype of the Antonov AN-70, which Ukraine was building jointly with Russia and Uzbekistan, crashed Friday evening near Kiev.

"The (AN-70) aircraft collided in the air with an AN-72 aircraft which was accompanying it," the statement said.

"The damaged AN-72 landed at the airport of its departure. According to preliminary information seven crew members of the AN-70 were killed."

The AN-70 was sitting deep in the ground in a forest near the town of Veliky Lis, about 40 kilometres from Kiev.

Only a wing stuck out of the frozen ground, and twisted steel parts were scattered about 30 metres around the steaming crash site.

On Saturday morning police, standing two-deep, encircled the crash site and brigades of soldiers moved into the area with shovels.

Local residents said they saw two planes flying close together at dusk, then, after a flash of light one of them started falling almost vertically.

Ukraine planned next year to start selling the AN-70 on the international market for military and civilian use.

It was designed to replace the ageing four-propellor AN-12 workhorse, and designers said it could carry up to 55 tonnes and fly up to 5,000 kilometres without refuelling.

The prototype first flew in January 1994.

"The production of the Antonov AN-70 is a very important state programme, and we see this accident as an extremely serious tragedy," said a senior official in the presidential administration, who asked not to be named.

Key Indian state holds 2nd round of polls today

BOMBAY (R) — Up to 27 million people were due to vote Sunday in India's western state of Maharashtra in a second round of assembly elections seen as crucial to Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's government.

A record 75 per cent of 26 million voters cast their ballots in the first round Thursday, even though widespread confusion over the introduction of voter identity cards prevented nearly 45,000 people from voting.

The ruling Congress Party is riven by internal dissension and smarting from election defeats in three southern states in November. Defeat in Maharashtra and five other states voting in the next two weeks could increase dissent and might precipitate early general elections, politicians say.

The polls will also determine the fate of Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar, a Rao rival who staked a claim to the Congress leadership, and thus the prime minister's job, in 1991, in succession to the assassinated Rajiv Gandhi.

Now Mr. Pawar is struggling to hold on to power in India's most industrialised state, whose capital is Bombay, the country's financial and commercial centre.

Opinion polls have predicted that an alliance between India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Hindu militant Shiv Sena would emerge as the biggest group in a hung assembly.

The latest poll, by the independent Centre for Media Studies, said Congress was unlikely to win more than 65 or 70 seats out of a total of 288.

The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance was seen winning 125 to 130 of the seats, just short of an overall majority.

With the central Janata Dal Party predicted to win between 45 and 50 seats, the balance of power could lie in the hands of a loose alliance of independents and small left and centrist parties.

In Bombay, which votes Sunday, the most emotional issue was the enmity of Muslims for Congress after Mr. Pawar jailed a large number of them under tough anti-terrorist laws following 1993 bomb attacks which killed 260 people in the city.

The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance has campaigned largely on charges that Congress is corrupt. "One year ago the state looked like an impregnable citadel for the Congress," BJP President Lal Krishan Advani told Reuters.

"Thanks to corruption, that citadel is today crumbling. The people want a change of government."

Analysts said the high voter turn-out at Thursday's polls, which compared to a 1990 figure of 60 per cent, indicated a new sense of discipline had been infused into the polling process.

"The turn-out is an expression of the new enthusiasm built up among voters by the preparatory work of the election commission," said K. Bhaskara Rao, of the Centre for Media Studies.

The Election Commission has strictly enforced campaign rules which are usually ignored and insisted on massive security to prevent the violence which often mars Indian elections and scares voters away.

"Such a turn-out would normally imply a desire for a change on the part of the voters," Mr. Rao said.

Counting of votes will start on March 11, after assembly elections in Gujarat, Bihar and Orissa states have ended, so that results in Maharashtra do not influence the voting in other states.

Counting in a poll in Manipur state starts on Feb. 20 and vote-counting in the Arunachal Pradesh state election begins on March 15.

Indian troops kill 5 civilians in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India (R) — Indian paramilitary forces shot dead five civilians in retaliation for an armed attack by Kashmiri separatists, police said Saturday.

They said militants Friday fired from close range at a Border Security Force (BSF) unit manning a checkpoint in the old quarter of Srinagar, the summer capital of the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir.

One BSF officer died on the spot and a second died later in an army hospital. The militants escaped with a BSF service rifle, police said.

Police said paramilitary forces then avenged the deaths by killing five civilians. Local residents and the United News of India news agency said all five were shopkeepers whose stores were near the troopers' sand bunker.

The Press Trust of India (PTI), quoting a senior security officer, said BSF troops had lost their temper and opened fire on passers-by, killing five shopkeepers and injuring 37 others.

Most of the injured were hurt in a stampede which followed the firing by the troops, PTI said.

BSF and army forces deployed in Jammu and Kashmir are largely drawn from other parts of mostly Hindu India, while police are generally residents of the state, India's only Muslim-majority state.

The bodies of the five victims were handed over to their families Saturday morning, police said. Paramilitary forces fanned out across the old city Saturday to prevent any protest demonstrations.

Business and transport ground to halt in the Kashmir Valley Saturday as residents marked the 11th anniversary of the death of Mohammad Maqbool Bhat, founder of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), who was hanged by authorities in 1984.

Almost all shops and other commercial establishments in the valley were closed and there was little traffic. Most government offices were closed.

Police and hospital officials say more than 17,000 people have been killed since a rebellion against Indian rule broke out four years ago.

Meanwhile the fugitive head of Bombay's mainly Muslim underworld group, Dawood Ibrahim, has offered to surrender to face trial for a string of bomb blasts in India's financial capital two years ago, a mediator said Saturday.

Bombay lawyer Mahesh Jethmalani said Mr. Ibrahim, a key accused in the blasts which killed 260 people on March 12, 1993, had made the offer a few months ago through leading Indian lawyer Ram Jethmalani from a hideout "in a European country."

Mr. Mahesh is the son of Ram Jethmalani, a member of parliament who once contested the Indian presidency.

Police had initially denied Mr. Jethmalani's claim. But in a Thursday report submitted to the judge investigating the bomb blasts, India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) set out the terms of Mr. Ibrahim's surrender.

"This is the first time these statements are being brought on record," the CBI spokesman told the court.

The report recorded statements by Mr. Jethmalani and his son on how they had communicated Mr. Ibrahim's offer to the Bombay Police and state Chief Minister Sharad Pawar.

"At first, the concerned officials denied they had met my father," Mr. Mahesh Jethmalani told Reuters. "That was false."

Mahesh Jethmalani said Mr. Ibrahim's conditions for surrender included that he be tried only for the blasts and that he be kept under house arrest during the trial.

The 40-year-old Ibrahim, also wanted in several cases of gangland killings, is the son of a former police inspector.

He started as a petty criminal who rose to prominence in Bombay's underworld and fled to Dubai in the mid-1980s after being accused of gunning down a rival in a courtroom. He is believed to run a wide-ranging gangster network in Bombay.

Police say they have evidence to show that the plastic explosive used in the bomb blasts was brought into India through a network set up by Mr. Ibrahim

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New chance for unfortunate

WHILE THE phenomenon of beggary has been with us since time immemorial, the problem seems to acquire an added dimension during the month of Ramadan. Many theories have been offered to explain this socio-economic disease ranging from poverty to exploitation. The minister of social development, Salwa Damen-Masri, has recently decided to examine the situation and seek remedies. What is still unknown is the methodology that her ministry will deploy for this purpose. Even more important is the availability of funds to deal with the aspects of the problem that are basically economic in nature. Still once the root causes of beggary are identified, its resolution can be that much more possible.

We suggest that beggary is in most part an economic problem deep-rooted in the unemployment crisis and the overall poverty condition prevailing in the country. On that score alone, it would seem that the answer to the dire economic conditions of so many Jordanians must not be found in beggary. The government must provide some measures to deal with extreme poverty cases inspite of the meagre resources available to it. There is still much fat in the state's expenditures that can be avoided and a fraction of the funds earmarked for them diverted to pressing socio-economic cases. Luxury cars driven by officials is one obvious example. Productivity within governmental circles is nowhere near satisfactory and in the process much waste occurs on daily basis. Improving the efficiency of the public sector could thus free some funds for use in alleviating the hardships of less unfortunate citizens.

The list of what can be done and how it can be done is indeed long and exhaustive. But having said that, we must accept the proposition that the phenomenon of beggary is not totally motivated by economic factors. In some circles, beggary has unfortunately become a profession and some form of racketeering. Many beggars are known to refuse work opportunities when offered jobs — menial though they may be — because they prefer beggary as a more profitable trade. And this aspect of the problem also needs to be tackled and weeded out from our midst.

Countless other countries suffer from the very same problem we face in Jordan. Recall the plight of the homeless, street children and other hapless people in such great cities as Washington D.C. and London, and you might discover that our problems here might pale in comparison. But we must admit that, regardless of what is happening elsewhere, we have a problem on our hands and we must strive harder to tackle and solve it.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

COMMENTING ON the planned Arab-Israeli meeting in Washington under U.S. auspices, Al Ra'i daily said the meeting is being held at a crucial stage in the peace process, when Palestinian-Israeli talks are almost in deadlock. The Washington parley assumes added importance following the meeting between Israel's prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat which failed due to differences over Israel's settlement programme and its continued closure of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, said the paper. The foreign ministers of Jordan, Israel, Egypt and Palestine are meeting against a backdrop of pessimism over the success of the peace process and amid warnings by Egypt and France that it could collapse unless a new life is breathed into it, continued the daily. The paper said that Israel's attempt to blame the Palestinians for the present deadlock does not help the cause of peace because Israel realizes that armed resistance is a natural outcome of the continued occupation. The paper said that Washington has a moral and serious responsibility towards ensuring the success of the peace process and should see to it that Israel remains committed to the requirements of peace.

A COLUMNIST in Al Ra'i daily said Saturday that the Iraqi foreign minister's visit to Ankara represents a significant development in Turkish-Iraqi relations following the Gulf war in which Turkey sided with the Western coalition. But the Iraqi minister would not need a lot of effort to persuade Turkey to improve its ties with its Arab neighbour because Turkey has realised that it was sustaining very heavy losses due to the embargo on Iraq, said Tareq Masarweh. Furthermore, the Islamic movement inside Turkey is growing and the Islamists have claimed victory in the municipal elections of Ankara, Istanbul and 15 other main cities, thus increasing their influence on the government, said the writer.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

By Dr. Fahed Al Fanek

Jordan's public administration deserves credit

THE PUBLIC INFORMATION apparatus in Jordan is not alone in being subjected to strong criticism from all directions. Public administration and the entire staff of the government, are also subjected to persistent criticism. Administrative reform is a permanent slogan of every government. One committee after another is formed to tackle this formidable task but they all end up in failure. The basic question is whether it was proved that public administration in Jordan is actually bad and inefficient and that it really needs a major overhaul to eliminate incompetence and corruption from among its ranks.

It is not quite an exaggeration to assert that Jordan is blessed with the best and most efficient and honest body of civil servants in the area, including Israel. We can cite tens of Arab and foreign businessmen, politicians and other observers who are qualified to compare and pass an objective judgement, who praised the Jordanian public administration.

Of course, we have the full right to harbour greater expectations, look for better performance, and aim at higher standards. Perfection is not attainable, and the potential for further improvement is always wide open. Perhaps it is even better if the bureaucracy remains under pressure and strict accountability in order to continue to upgrade its performance. But this is something, and the sweeping condemnation of the Jordanian public administration and the denial of its achievements and qualities, is something else.

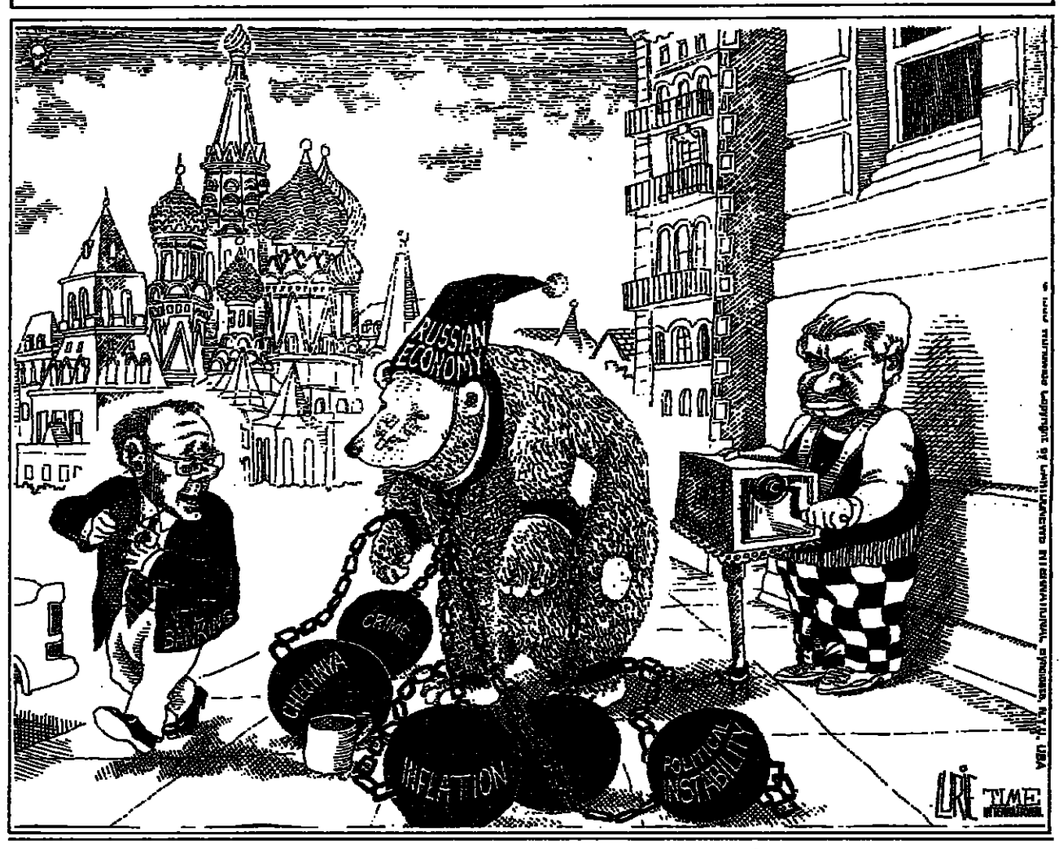
At the outset, we should admit that public sector management has its inherent deficiencies. This is an integral part of the nature of mentality prevailing in the public sector everywhere, because incentives are limited, competition is almost non existent and public funds don't have the respect and care that one can expect regarding private funds. But such deficiencies and shortcomings are found in every country. That is why there is a universal call for less government and smaller public sector. It is agreed nowadays that the public sector should not be involved in producing commodities or services for the market if the private sector is able to undertake the function of production and marketing.

"Of course, it is our right to continue to press for administration development and upgrading as a continuous process. But it is our duty to be fair and objective and recognise excellence when we see one, and give credit where it is due."

A fair observer can't but admire and appreciate the manner by which Jordanian public activities are conducted, even when such activities and functions involve the participation of hundreds or thousands of individuals, such as summit conferences, festivals, conferences, dealing with emergencies, conducting the Jordanian-Israeli negotiations, the construction of the crossings to Israel, the building of bridges and tunnels in record times, etc. All these large scale activities were conducted and managed with competence, and demonstrated that team work can be orchestrated successfully.

At the level of public institutions, we can point out several symbols of success and undeniable excellence. How can anyone rate the performance of the Passport Department, Vehicles Licensing Department, Amman Municipality, Aqaba Port Authority, King Hussein's Medical City, especially its heart centre, the Central Bank of Jordan and the national universities. This is not to mention the Armed Forces, the Public Security Department, the Intelligence Services, the Civil Defence Department, all of which are the pride of all Jordanians due to excellent performance of duties.

Of course, it is our right to continue to press for administration development and upgrading as a continuous process. But it is our duty to be fair and objective and recognise excellence when we see one, and give credit where it is due.



From Kobe and Mexico, remarkably similar messages

By Philip Bowring

HONG KONG — In differing but complementary ways, the peso crisis and the Kobe earthquake should be shaking the countries and markets of Southeast Asia out of their complacency.

It is too early to do more than sketch out the possible longer-term impacts of Kobe. The immediate one may be beneficial for Asian (and other) producers of steel, cement, glass and so on — mainly South Korea and Taiwan.

It is possible, in the medium term, that instead of rebuilding at home, Japanese firms will relocate more plants in Southeast Asia. Alternatively, disruptions to transport may make firms wary of dispersing component plants.

Longer term, the quake will reinforce the trend to increased import propensity in Japan, with domestic demand supplanting exports as the main source of growth in gross domestic product. This will be good for the world, and for Asian exports.

However, it will mean a drying up of the Japanese current account surplus. Southeast Asia has been the major beneficiary of recycling of the surplus: this has financed much of the region's rapid growth. Kobe's message is that exports will remain buoyant, and large current account deficits will be increasingly difficult to finance. The result: lower growth.

The message from Mexico is surprisingly similar. Initially, there were a few quiet sniggers around Asia at Mexican problems: This was proof that the Latin revival was hype, not substance. Latins did not have what it takes to emulate or challenge Asia. The smirks quickly vanished, however, when some Asian stock markets and currencies (notably the Thai baht and the Hong Kong dollar), were hit by waves of Western selling in the belief that there was a string of would-be Mexican problems in Asia.

At the macroeconomic level, and with the exception of the Philippines, the dissimilarities are greater than the similarities. Foreign debt-to-GDP ratios for Southeast Asia are often higher than for Latin America — Thailand and Indonesia are around 60 per cent, compared with Mexico's 35 per cent. But Asian countries have kept big foreign exchange reserve cushions — $28 billion for Thailand compared with less than $10 billion for precrisis Mexico. And trade plays a much larger part in the Asian economies, so debt is more easily serviced.

Per Capita income in Malaysia, for instance, is roughly similar to that of Mexico: but with a population less than a quarter of Mexico's, it exports the same amount. Currencies in Southeast Asia (and China) have mostly been kept deliberately undervalued to stimulate exports — Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia as well as China have seen their real effective exchange rates decline in recent years.

Current account deficits in Southeast Asia also reflect much higher rates of investment — an average 35 per cent against just over 20 per cent in Mexico and most of Latin America. They have been financed by a mix of direct private investment, long-and short-term borrowings and portfolio flows. Mexico was financing its own mostly through that most volatile of all money — portfolio flows into equities and debt securities.

Most of the Asian countries concerned have records of macro-management which suggest that they can rein in their growth to keep their current deficits at financeable levels, keeping their currencies stable. The exceptions are China, which is still largely closed, and totally open Hong Kong, with its formal peg to the U.S. dollar. Pegs have a habit of breaking under pressure. But the only pressure strong enough to break the Hong Kong one is the factor that led to it in the first place: the politics of 1997.

However, though the macro picture remains favourable, some Asian stock markets are as dependent as the Latin ones on foreign portfolio interest; this accounts for about 25 per cent of Bangkok's turnover and new issue subscriptions, 30 per cent of Manila's, 40 per cent of Hong Kong's and more than half of Jakarta's.

So it is unsurprising that Southeast Asia cannot avoid sharp swings in foreign portfolio sentiment. Nor is the matter ended here. If total flows into U.S. equity mutual funds decline, expect further pain in Asian markets. So Mexico is both symptom of a tightening in world liquidity and reason why the past beneficiaries of easy money may now have to tighten their belts.

This could mean high-fliers like Thailand and Malaysia having to accept growth levels around 6.5 per cent, not 8.5 per cent. That is hardly disastrous. But it would be a significant change. It also spells trouble for the most indebted country in the region, Australia, which is now in as deep a hole as New Zealand was a decade ago and has a heavily traded currency vulnerable to attack.

The other Asian lesson of the crisis is that the United States will have to go to almost any lengths now to help Mexico. This is not just to protect the tens of billions of capital poured into Mexico over the past four years and the rescue package before Congress.

It is to shore up what will remain a keystone of U.S. policy — the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) — whoever runs Washington. For the United States, NAFTA is an expression of foreign, domestic and trade policy all in one. It is also the other side of the coin of Mexico's commitment to liberal economic policies and general good neighbourliness on two highly sensitive domestic issues on both sides of the Rio Grande — immigration and employment. The knock-on effect of Mexico's problems on Argentina and Brazil may also stiffen hemispheric cooperation, even if the short-term effect is to slow trade and investment.

International Herald Tribune.

Clinton returns to his stumbling ways

By Gene Gibbons
Reuter

WASHINGTON — Watching U.S. President Bill Clinton's presidency unfold is like watching an old film starring that master of slapstick, Charlie Chaplin — no matter how hard he tries, the end result is almost always a comic disaster.

Take the fumbled nomination of a new surgeon general.

Just when Mr. Clinton seemed to be making a modest comeback from the Democratic meltdown in last year's elections, his selection of a Tennessee obstetrician-gynocologist to be the nation's top public health official threatens to become a gigantic political liability.

Henry Foster, a highly respected black physician known for trying to curb teen pregnancy, seemed an ideal choice to replace the loose-lipped Joycelyn Elders, who was ousted as surgeon general late last year because her outspoken views on sex and drugs were damaging Mr. Clinton politically.

But the White House failed to anticipate and neutralise a question likely to face any physician in an era when abortion is the hottest of hot-button issues: What his practice involved.

That failure has dredged up bad memories of other bungled nominations, and thrust Mr. Clinton into a no-win situation:

Anti-abortion forces are attacking him for the nomination, and pro-choice forces are up in arms about what they regard as Mr. Clinton's waffling in response.

Worse yet, Mr. Foster's differing accounts of how many abortions he has performed is triggering attacks from others who say the real issue is not his record as a doctor, but his credibility.

"It's an inexcusable screw-up," said a Democratic political operative close to the White House. "You can't entirely blame Clinton for it. You can't expect him to ask every person about every issue: that's what staff is for."

A White House insider said the Mr. Clinton team was so anxious to seize the initiative in the national debate over values by launching a campaign to combat an epidemic of teen pregnancy in the United States, it rushed the Foster nomination.

"There's no one on staff who would say that we served the president and the nominee as best we could. We should have done a better job, and we're looking forward and getting everything prepared for what we know will be a hard fight (to confirm Dr. Foster), but we believe will be a very successful and effective fight," White House Spokesman Mike McCurry said.

In an editorial on Friday, the New York Times said: "The nomination... has been so badly bungled, by the White House and by Dr. Foster himself, that there is little choice but to hope it dies quickly..."

The Foster fiasco coincided with Mr. Clinton's futile effort to end the big league baseball strike.

Despite his spokesman's warning that the president would take a "40-ounce louisville slugger" baseball bat to the players and owners if they didn't resolve their six month-old labour dispute, Mr. Clinton had no big stick to wield in the end.

"We have done the best we can," he said after five hours of presidential arm-twisting on Tuesday night failed to budge the stalled baseball negotiations. Mr. Clinton tried to toss the ball to Congress, but Republican leaders of the legislative branch said they were not about to become involved.

"Mr. Clinton's performance looked weak by comparison with the standard set by previous presidents like Harry Truman, John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan."

Mr. Clinton's performance looked weak by comparison with the standard set by previous presidents like Harry Truman, John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan.

Truman threatened to use troops to end a post-World War II coal strike, Kennedy stared down steel industry tycoons who were planning what he regarded as an inflationary price hike and Reagan broke up an air traffic controllers' strike by firing strikers who defied his order to return.

"I don't see why Clinton got involved," said a veteran of Jimmy Carter's White House staff. Mr. Carter was the last Democrat to serve as president.

A former member of Mr. Clinton's staff said the ups and downs of Mr. Clinton's first two years in office were not as troublesome as his current woes.

"We thought we had all the time in the world to make up for our initial mistakes. But with the 1996 presidential race just around the corner, that make-up time is no longer there," he said.

Mr. Clinton has said he will seek reelection in 1996. While he has no inter-party opposition now, political sources said his continuing problems make a Democratic primary challenge almost certain.

LETTERS

A car accident, a nightmare

To the Editor:

HAVING A car accident is upsetting, but it need not turn into a nightmare. Wednesday, I had the misfortune of skidding into the car in front of me in the middle of a snowstorm. Fortunately, no one was injured. However, the police procedures turned into an all-day affair. After going to the police station and starting the paperwork, I was told I had to pay a JD 5 fine. That in itself wasn't a problem. Yet finding a policeman to accept the money was no easy feat.

At the police station, I was instructed to find an officer standing at one of the junctions in Amman to pay the fine. I sought out no less than four officers and not one of them had the magic receipt book. In the end, I was told that the only other option was to go to the Directorate of Traffic in Mahata. I eventually sorted out the matter there.

The obvious question is: Why aren't the necessary receipt books available at police stations throughout the city? Wouldn't it make more sense to pay the officer who writes the report and finish with the matter? With traffic accidents an unfortunate daily occurence, it's time to make procedures easier, not only for drivers, but for the police force which is indeed doing its best to serve the community.

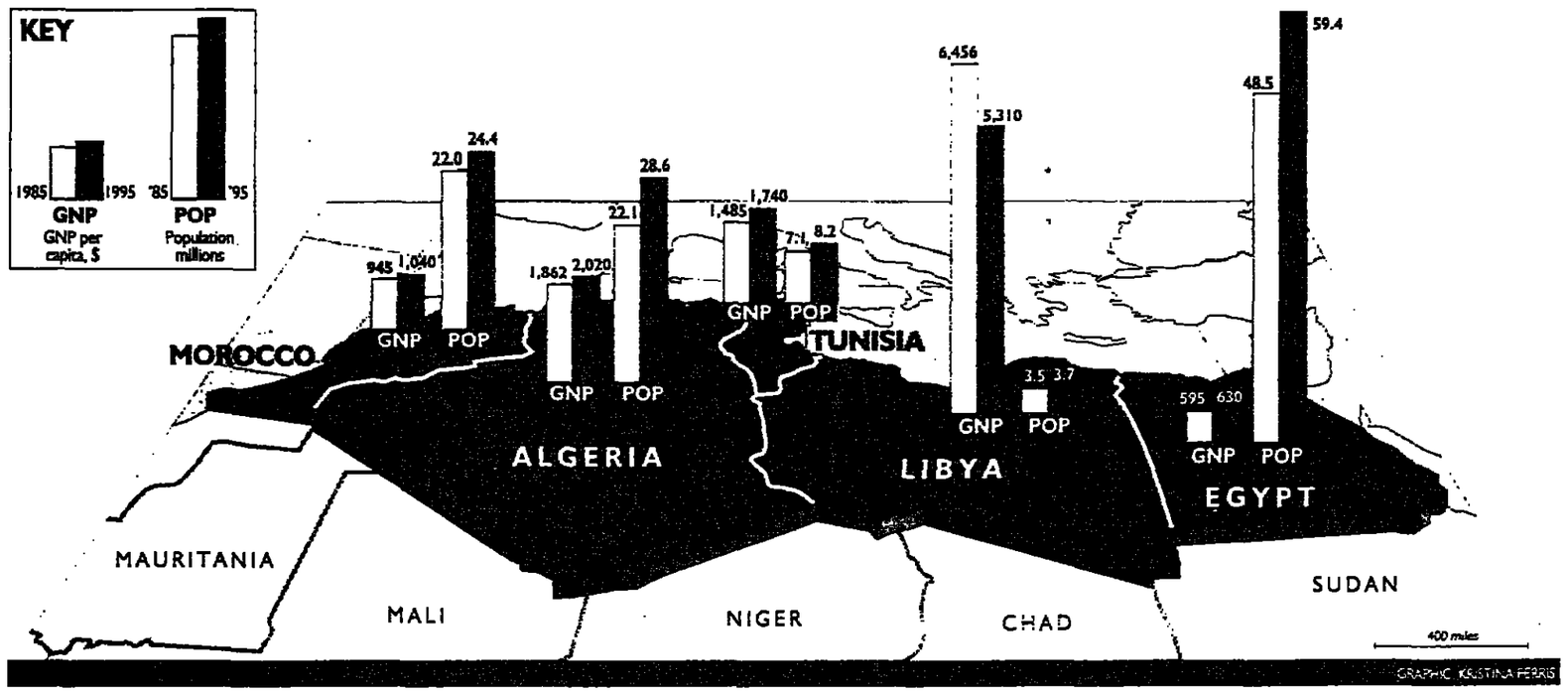
Amjad Tadros,
Amman.

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any subject they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication, however, should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld only upon request and under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing. The newspaper is not responsible for the return of unused manuscripts.

هكذا من الأصل

Europe must look south, not east

The greatest challenge facing the EU lies not in Eastern Europe but in the rise of fundamentalism in the Maghreb, argues Michael Sheridan



BRITAIN WILL come under new pressure within the European Union (EU) later this year as France and *Spain push for a crucial* shift in focus from the countries of eastern Europe to the troubled Muslim nations on the southern shores of the Mediterranean — across the "new fault line" that has replaced the old iron curtain.

The southern European members of the EU are pressing for the biggest change in priorities since the collapse of Eastern Europe in 1989 and for a reexamination of the enormous political and financial commitment since made to the new governments in the east.

Frightened by the civil war raging in Algeria and the threat of hostile Islamic regimes taking over along the whole coast of North Africa, they are urging the union to act before it is too late.

"There is a kind of paranoia around which can give rise to fatalistic pessimism," says the Spanish Foreign Minister, Javier Solana. "Look at the disparity in incomes between north and south, combine that with population growth and you have the ingredients for the conflict between Islam and Europe that has made up so much of the unhappy history of the Mediterranean."

The French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe, also *argued strongly for a* change in priorities at recent meetings with British Prime Minister John Major and Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. France has been traumatised by the Algerian conflict, which has cost 30,000 lives. The French government, apparently powerless to influence events in a country it ruled for 132 years, is now seeking to "Europeanise" the problem. France and Spain are powerfully placed to influence policy because Paris holds the presidency of the EU for the first half *of this year and Madrid* takes over the second half. Mr. Solana was speaking at a conference in Barcelona last weekend which was clearly seen by the Spanish government as an opportunity to set out the Mediterranean agenda and to prepare the ground for a grandiose regional summit in the city in the autumn.

But there is a simple flaw within the European Un*ion's strategy. It focuses on* the hopeful notion that economic improvement can resolve political unrest. Yet the true reason for upheaval in the Muslim World is a crisis of legitimacy in the political systems installed at independence. Most are secular dictatorships or monarchies rejected as heretical and invalid by "Islamists" — Muslims who see in their religion the only valid blueprint for governance.

Nowhere has this revolutionary change in popular psychology proved more *dramatic than in Algeria.* Once held up as a model of Third World independence and non-alignment, Algeria today provides a nightmare that has skaken the entire north African establishment and thrust itself into the heart of French domestic politics. Under assault from an armed fundamentalist uprising, the security forces have fought back with a terrifying dis*play of brutality and the* draconian suspension of civil liberties. Unable either to enter a compromise dialogue or to win an outright confrontation, both the hardline military-backed government and its fanatical Islamist foes are locked in a stalemate.

Although Algeria's vital output of oil and natural gas appears undamaged so far, its society is set on a downward spiral towards fragmentation and bloody chaos. Two critical effects could flow from the breakdown of order in Algiers: *the installation of a hostile,* extreme Islamic regime and the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Algeria's secular, French-speaking middle class, as they become the boat people of southern Europe. The big question for the foreign ministries of France, Spain and Italy is will Algeria be the domino whose fall sets off a collapse throughout the region?

The Islamic movements *certainly hope so.* And while Europeans bicker and argue over budgets, priorities and contingency plans, the inexorable forces of change are sweeping across the region. In the western Arab states, known as the Maghreb ("the lands on which the sun sets"), the principal problem is the rapid growth in population which outstrips economic growth. The result is poverty and corruption, together increasing popular anger at the lack of legitimacy inherent in authoritarian governments. In the eastern Arab nations of the Mediterranean, the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict remains cause and catalyst of political upheaval.

The common factor in both cases is the upsurge of religious zeal as the Islamists — often young people, city dwellers and the disenfranchised poor — seek a new way of life to replace the outworn dogmas of Arab nationalism and state *socialism. They rejected* western cultural values and rejoice in the confrontation with Zionism, regarded by militant Muslims as a form of imperialist invasion.

If the Algerian domino falls, what of its neighbours? Morocco, remains stable under the long rule of King Hassan whose rule is supported by the merchant class and clergy. But illiteracy and high unemployment have not been cured by Morocco's economic development.

Fundamentalists have not made much progress in Morocco but they have mounted a determined campaign in Tunisia, where women were emancipated a generation ago and economic reform is bearing fruit. Tunisia's secular elite has chosen to repress militant Islam and to try to ride out the storm. Cosmopolitan and well-entrenched, it has naturally adapted to trade with the EU. Tunisia needs closer ties with Europe and *would benefit from the* judicious use of development aid. But a triumph for Islamist guerrillas in Algeria would renew the battle by Tunisia's fundamentalist exiles — some of them based in London — against the regime of President Zine El Abedine Ben Ali.

The bridge between the Maghreb states and the Middle East is formed by Libya, for which the EU possesses no known strategy. Bombed by the United States in 1986 in retaliation for its involvement in "state terrorism," Libya has receded into the silence of the pariah. Its comparatively small population languishes under the rule of Colonel Muammar Qadhafi and the country is under U.N. embargo because it refuses to extradite two intelligence agents wanted in Scotland for the bombing of Pan Am flight 103.

After Algeria, Colonel Qadhafi's neighbour, *Egypt, poses the next big* question for policymakers in Europe. The government of President Hosni Mubarak is waging a war against fundamentalists second only in brutality to the battle in Algiers. Egypt's rapidly growing population and economic underdevelopment parallel Algeria, while the regime's iron fisted response to violence is destined only to create new martyrs and intensify the zeal of its foes. Most European countries continue to support Egypt but have quietly placed its government on the "at risk" list.

The faltering Middle East peace negotiations and the recent wave of "martyrdom" suicide bombings have spurred on the Islamic opponents to Yasser Arafat and pushed Israeli public opinion away from any further compromise. That is bound to have an effect on the ideological and religious battles from Suez to Casablanca.

It is hard to see what influence Europeans can exercise over such a profound and irreconcilable contest. The European Commission wants to support economic modernisation in countries that agree to open their markets. It believes that Brussels should also help structural adjustment in countries that cannot yet afford to take the risks involved in free trade. It wants to "strengthen north-south economic and financial cooperation" and to support the Middle East peace process.

But Britain and Germany, net contributors to the EU coffers, are certain to oppose any plans that dramatically increase spending in the south and do not want to see new institutions created. "We don't believe that money alone can solve these problems," is the instinctive reaction of Douglas Hurd, the British Foreign Secretary.

If money cannot, then what can? Perhaps, argue some, the Europeans should stand back, await the inevitable sea-change on the southern shores and then deal realistically with the Islamic governments which emerge. To the westernised middle classes in the countries of North Africa, that is but a counsel of despair.

It is clear, whatever the choice, that the European Union cannot escape involvement. A violent collapse could well have ensued in Algeria by the time presidents and prime ministers assemble for a Mediterranean summit in Barcelona next autumn.

By then the agenda may not focus on economics but on military intervention — perhaps to safeguard expatriates or protect vital petrochemical installations. The one certainty is best expressed by Andre Azoulay, a senior adviser to King Hassan of Morocco, who urges western Europe to examine its interests without delay. "We don't have the time," says Mr. Azoulay, "and you don't have the time either."

The Independent

Meeting seeks to end impasse

(Continued from page 1)

adopted a positive position and respected its commitments and cannot accept responsibility for the terrorist operations which have happened recently," Dr. Baz added.

"Such acts of violence were *taking place before the* Palestinian Authority took charge when the Israeli authorities were running the occupied territories," he said.

The PLO will present a list of demands to help save the stalled peace process at the *meeting in Washington,* Palestinian officials said.

"We hope tomorrow to stress that the key to peace in the region is the Palestinian track," said senior negotiator Saeb Erakat after the weekly meeting of the Palestinian self-rule authority in Gaza on Saturday.

"A failure in the Palestinian track will mean failure in all," said Mr. Erakat, who is also minister of local government in the self-rule authority.

He and other officials told reporters the Palestinian delegation to the Washington talks will present a memorandum with demands to seek an end to the stalemate with Israel on extending self-rule.

While they would not disclose the demands, the officials said they would address sticking points including an Israeli army redeployment on the West Bank, the closure of the West Bank and Gaza, Jewish settlements and elections to a Palestinian autonomy council.

Meanwhile, despite the return of Syria's ambassador to Washington, peace talks with Israel remain suspended. And an Egyptian drive to force Israel to open its facilities to nuclear inspectors could mar the Sunday meeting.

Ambassador Walid Al Mouallem returned this week from Damascus after a lengthy absence but has not rescheduled talks suspended last December with Israel's ambassador, Itamar Rabinovich.

Their quiet meetings in Washington were the only active contacts between Syria and Israel, sparring for more than three years over peace terms and the future of the strategic Golan Heights.

Syria also has excluded itself from Sunday's meeting.

Syria on Saturday launched a scathing attack on Mr. Rabin and said Damascus would not put up with the same treatment as the Palestinians at the hands of the Jewish state.

The official daily Al Thawra blasted Mr. Rabin's "be*haviour in peace negotia*tions, especially on the Palestinian track, and his mentality of wanting everything: peace, land and security" without giving anything in exchange.

"What is happening on the Palestinian track will not be *repeated elsewhere,*" the paper said, adding that it was "impossible" to consider any compromise on an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan.

Efforts to draft a communique for the Washington meeting were complicated by Egypt's drive to force Israel to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and diplomats may be unable to reach agreement on a strong anti-terrorism provision.

Egypt is asking for concessions by Israel on the nuclear issue in exchange, according to diplomats who spoke on *condition of anonymity. They* hope to reconcile the differences by Sunday.

Meanwhile, U.S. arms control director John D. Holum and other senior administration officials hope Israel can be persuaded to agree to a worldwide ban on production of fissile material, and that Egypt will accept that as a significant first step toward broader nuclear controls.

But Egypt this week lined up seven other Arab countries to back its demands and may not vote to approve indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty when the issue comes up at a 170-nation conference in New York in April.

Deal with PLO not sacred

(Continued from page 1)

ters said they intended to focus Sunday's Washington talks on their stepped up demands to implement the next stage of the autonomy agreement.

"I think the peace process is facing serious danger," said Dr. Erakat.

"Either Israel makes peace by implementing the agreement... or Israel says it doesn't want peace and then we are facing a serious collapse of the peace process," he said.

Ministers said the cabinet drew up a memorandum of its demands in Saturday's meeting which will be presented at the Washington gathering.

"If this meeting tomorrow does not respond positively to Palestinian concerns, it will be a useless and unnecessary meeting and it will wreak havoc on the entire peace process," said PNA Economics Minister Ahmad Qouriea.

Nabil Shaath, a top Palestinian negotiator and a senior member of the self-rule government in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho, left Friday night for Washington with Justice Minister Freih Abu Medin.

PLO representatives in the United States and the United Nations will also participate in the talks.

The Palestinians have grown increasingly frustrated by the closure of Israel's borders, keeping Palestinian labourers from reaching their places of employ in Israel.

Israel also halted transport of gasoline to Gaza after a security guard escorting an Israeli tanker was killed in the Gaza Strip last week.

Gas stations ran empty on Saturday and had to turn cars away.

Mr. Qouriea said that if the gas shortage was not resolved, Gaza would have to turn to Egypt and Jordan for their supply. He repeated the Palestinian demand that Israel ease the *customs* restrictions on the self-rule area's international borders.

"If the Israelis want to close the West Bank and Gaza and maintain the closure they can do this. But they must open the borders with Jordan and Egypt," he said.

In Damascus, two Palestinian factions blasted Sunday's meeting in Washington as a bid to extract more concessions from the Arabs.

"The meeting of the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, the United States, Israel and a representative from the Palestinian self-rule authority, was called for by Washington to provide more achievements for Israel," *said a joint statement by the* Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine.

It accused the United States of supporting Israel's policies and working to keep Israel militarily superior to the Arabs.

"The United States wants to keep Israel's military edge over the Arabs and reject all sorts of pressure on Israel concerning its nuclear armaments," the statement added.

It also accused Israel of attempts to turn the PNA *into a "tool of suppression"* to eliminate the Palestinian uprising and resistance against the Jewish state.

Libya, building on deadlock in the Middle East peace process, on Saturday slammed Mr. Arafat, saying the United States and Israel had let him down and left him isolated.

"He (Arafat) became only a mayor, rather, less than that," the Libyan (Pan-Arab) Unity Ministry said in a statement carried by the official news agency JANA.

Libya reiterated that the only solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a "democratic Palestine" with Jews from Russia, Europe and Arab states returning *home.*

"The submission to the Israeli will.. has demonstrated the fragility of agreements signed with them. Here is Yasser Arafat who signed a number of accords with the Israelis becoming isolated from the Palestinian people after the Israelis and Americans let him down," the Libyan statement said.

"He became the mayor of a municipality, rather, less than that," it added.

"We reaffirm what we have already proposed, that *an objective solution able to* assure cohabitation between Arabs and Palestinian Jews is the establishment of their democratic state as in South Africa, and the return home of Palestinians, and the return to their countries of Jews who emigrated from Russia, Europe and Arab countries," it added.

Egyptian unions stage protest

(Continued from page 12)

on Friday asking members of parliament to vote against the amendment. The doctors called it "an attempt to bury union freedoms alive."

In 1993, apparently in an attempt to reduce the Islamist influence the associations, parliament passed a law annulling union elections if less than 50 per cent of members voted.

Turkey reopen

(Continued from page 1)

the region). I discussed the subject with the Iraqi foreign minister. The minister and his delegation discussed the matter with the president and prime minister. I believe the talks have been very useful," Mr. Karayalcin said.

He also said that in the near future talks would be held on "the new roles the Turkish private sector could play in Iraq," and on bilateral security issues.

Jordan's envoy

(Continued from page 1)

Farouk Al Sharaa delegated Mutie Nasser, the Syrian charge d'affaires in Amman, to attend the funeral.

Born in Karak in 1938, Adaileh obtained a bachelor degree in commerce and worked for the diplomatic *service since 1968 serving in a* number of Arab countries. Adaileh, who has been ambassador to Syria since November 1993, is survived by a wife and four sons.

Algerian group warns of violence

(Continued from page 12)

French television stations showed crates being loaded into two Algerian cargo planes at Marseille airport on Friday night and said they were the first two of nine Franco-German Ecureuil helicopters that France agreed to sell last year.

The French defence ministry declined comment.

The FIS has said it fears the helicopters will be used against them and had urged France to block deliveries.

Foreign Minister Alain Juppe confirmed the planned sale to Algeria last November and said the government had refused a request to convert them for military use. He has said that France does not give any significant military aid to Algiers.

Militants killed four civilians, including a local mayor, in the east Algerian region of Mila, the Algerian newspaper Le Matin said on Saturday.

The newspaper, citing a message of condolences from the regional governor, said one of those killed in the "horrible criminal act," was Abdul Hamid Koune, appointed mayor of Sidi Khelif after the authorities dissolved local authorities controlled by the FIS.

Le Matin did not say when the four were killed or give details about the other three victims.

Western intelligence source say between 600 and 800 people are being killed each month in the conflict.

Rivals say N. Irish peace must open prison gates

By Martin Cowley

Reuter

BELFAST — In Northern Ireland's Republican strongholds, where the Irish Republican Army (IRA) plotted a 25-year war against British rule, every child knows the meaning of "saoirse", an ancient Irish Clarion call for "freedom".

Along the narrow terraces of loyalist neighbourhoods emblazoned with garish pro-British murals, Protestants care nothing for Irish catchwords. They use different words but the demand is the same — "the boys" must be released from jail.

On Friday, the Irish government announced it would grant early release to five IRA prisoners in response to the ending of hostilities in Northern Ireland. It freed nine others at Christmas.

But so far Britain shows no sign of following suit. It fought a gruelling war for a quarter of a century, losing almost 1,000 troops and police, mainly in IRA bomb and bullet ambushes.

There are some 600 Republican prisoners, mostly Irish Republican Army "volunteers", and about 400 loyalist extremists, members of the Ulster Volunteer Force or Ulster Freedom Fighters.

London says no "political *prisoners" are housed in* Northern Ireland's prisons, and that all inmates will serve out their terms. Republicans see this attitude as a major block on the road to a lasting peace in the province.

Protestant political activist William Smith, speaking in his office in Belfast's Shankill road loyalist heartland, said he was also disappointed that Britain hasn't started freedom moves, following ceasefires by the rival forces last autumn.

"As far as I'm concerned, the war is over, and the legacy of that war is the prisoners. We have to remove that legacy as quickly as possible as a practical step on the road to permanent peace," said Mr. Smith of the tiny Progressive Unionist Party.

At a saoirse group rally in a Belfast Catholic area, Mairead Ui Adhmaill gets a rousing cheer from relatives of IRA inmates when she says she looks forward to "putting a big notice on the (Republican) prisoner-of-war department, saying "closed permanently."

Her husband was recently sentenced to 25 years for plotting explosions in England. Speaking of the need to heal divisions she said prisoner releases were part of that process.

The guns fell silent in Northern Ireland's war last September when the Irish Republican Army said it was ending its armed struggle. Loyalists fighting to keep the province British called off their violence six weeks later.

Opponents of an open-gates policy warn against being dewy-eyed about the prisoners and are adamant that their dead or maimed victims and their families must not be forgotten.

The guerrillas' friends in sprawling housing estates or small scattered farmsteads across the countryside say most would not be behind bars in a normal society.

They reject British politicians' portrayals of "mindless killers and thugs", pleading their crimes were politically motivated

Yemen fails to adopt World Bank reforms amid fear of unrest

SANAA (AFP) — The Yemeni government is divided over harsh economic reforms called for by the World Bank amid fears they could trigger unrest, a government source said Friday.

A three-day cabinet meeting ended in a split in the two-party coalition this week over the measures to cut inflation and plug the budget deficit in one of the world's poorest countries, a member of the Islamic party Al Islah told AFP.

They include more than doubling the price of petrol from six riyals (seven cents) a litre to 15 riyals (17 cents) and an end to government subsidies on staple foods such as flour, bread, oil and sugar that cost the government about $300 million a year.

A World Bank delegation has visited Yemen to press home the need for free-market economic reforms and the development of the private sector.

Prime Minister Abdul Aziz Abdul Ghani proposed the package but it was rejected by the eight ministers from Al Islah, which is in coalition with the General People's Congress of President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Al Islah fears the measures could lead to unrest, the party member said, asking to remain anonymous.

The daily Ash Sahwa, the party's mouthpiece, said "the proposals submitted to the government could have disastrous consequences for the population and block the country's economic activity."

Yemen's struggling economy was badly hit by the May-July civil war which cost the country $11 billion, according to Sanaa's estimates.

A special commission was created in November to draw up the 1995 budget, but vast differences over public spending have left it in suspense.

The government last adopted a formal budget in 1992, and since then has cobbled together figures based on previous spending and income levels.

Experts have predicted that the 1995 budget deficit will reach 62 billion riyals ($740 million on the black market, or $5 billion at the official rate).

There is also disagreement on measures to fight corruption that have been denounced by a coalition of the 13 opposition parties.

A decision Wednesday to arrest 200 traders and money-changers for "fraud and trafficking" was not carried out.

Deputy Supply Minister Abdul Mejid Al Mekhlafi, a member of Al Islah, told AFP the "problem was much more complex" than just arresting 200 people

Oman boosts industrial growth

MUSCAT (AFP) — The Arab Gulf state of Oman has registered an annual industrial growth rate of 15 per cent over the last four years in its drive to diversify its oil-reliant economy, officials said Wednesday.

Maqbul Ibn Ali Ibn Sultan, trade and industry minister, said industrial growth was three per cent ahead of forecasts in Oman's five-year plan for 1991 to 1995.

Official figures show that industry contributed 4.3 per cent to Oman's gross domestic product (GDP) in 1993, compared with 3.8 per cent in 1990 and 0.3 per cent in 1980.

Non-oil industry output climbed above 190 million riyals ($494 million) in 1993 from 120 million riyals ($312 million) in 1989.

Meanwhile, the sultanate's industrial exports rose to 135 million riyals ($351 million) in 1993 from 90 million riyals ($234 million) in 1989.

Oman, which is not a member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, has launched the most far-reaching programme of economic reforms of all Gulf states.

Britain's rich-poor gap widest in 50 years — study

LONDON (AFP) — The gap between Britain's rich and poor is the widest in a half-century, according to a blue-ribbon study released Friday amid a furor over huge salaries paid to executives of recently privatised utilities.

The results of the most intensive such study in two decades showed income disparity had grown wider and faster in Britain in recent years than in any other industrialised nation with the exception of New Zealand.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's year-long Study of Income and Wealth showed million of British families straddling the poverty line, disenfranchised from any stake in future prosperity.

The heads of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Trade Union Council (TUC) warned that lasting benefits could accrue only through tax cuts targeted specifically at the lowest income groups.

"Failure to reintegrate this excluded minority into the mainstream of society will leave the well-to-do majority with a heavy price to pay in terms of increased public spending, wasted economic resources and social dislocation," said the report.

The standard of living for the poor that prevails in many parts of Britain is "simply unacceptably low in a society as rich as ours," said the report.

Peter Barclay, chairman of the study and former head of the government's, Social Security advisory Committee, described the widening income rift as the "gravest public concern."

The study was released as unions and other employee organisations issued almost daily executive officers (CEOs) of recently privatised public utilities.

At a time when teachers, doctors, and civil servants were getting average pay hikes of 2.5 per cent, British Gas CEO Cedric Brown, for example, saw his salary raised 75 per cent to £475,000 ($800,000).

Other utility CEOs got commensurately high increases.

British Telecom CEO Lain Vallance infuriated the medical profession when, defending his £630,000 ($1 million) salary, he said he would find it "relaxing" to do the work of a junior doctors.

Controversy has also erupted over the granting of millions of pounds worth of share options to top executives in the country's privatised power generating firms.

The Rowntree study is highly critical of the so-called "trickle-down" principle of wealth, saying essentially that when the rich grow richer, virtually none of the new wealth finds its way into the pockets of the poor.

In contrast to any other period since World War II, it says, as much as the lowest 30 per cent of earners have failed to derive any benefit from national economic growth.

"Everyone knows the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer," said TUC General Secretary John Monks. "It cannot be allowed to continue."

He said more training and education was the key to "helping employees get fairer rewards and enabling those with no jobs stand a better chance of getting out of unemployment."

CBI Director-General Howard Davies called for a "strategy which goes with the grain of those global changes."

"At present, far too much of our public spending is devoted to compensating for the effects of failure, rather than investing in the ingredients of success," he said.

Kuwaiti petrol prices may rise up to 40%

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — Petrol prices here could rise by up to 40 per cent amid plans to end subsidies on oil, water and electricity, a senior government official was quoted as saying Saturday.

He told the Arab Times daily that the government in the oil-rich emirate was considering a proposal to hike gas prices, between 35 to 40 per cent as part of wide-ranging economic reforms.

The increase would bring prices to between 68 to 90 fils a litre (22 to 30 cents) but no date has been set for their introduction, he added.

The series of measures which include plans to increase customs duties are among reforms called for by the World Bank to restore the country's economy hit by the seven month Iraqi occupation from August 1990 to February 1991.

The World Bank's latest report on Kuwait urged the government to adopt economic reforms to slash the budget deficit.

It recommended cutting welfare state subsidies and maximising government savings to help diversify and strengthen its oil-based economy.

World Bank official Nicholas Carter announced in January the emirate would undertake a series of economic reforms in the "coming months."

The Kuwaiti finance ministry announced last week that the government intends to slash the estimated deficit in its 1995/1996 budget by more than a third, or about $1.6 billion, and plans to wipe out the shortfall by 2000.

Meanwhile the governor of the central bank, Sheikh Salem Ibn Abdul Al Sabah announced Saturday that the treasury had received more than $5 billion in reimbursements.

U.N. sees fast growth for world engineering industry

GENEVA (R) — United Nations analysts have predicted fast growth for world engineering industries over the next few years, with the United States leading the climb out of recession.

But in a detailed report on the global state of the sector, they said the upswing would come through increased productivity and was unlikely to have any major impact on unemployment, particularly in western Europe.

"After passing through the worst recession in the post-war period, world engineering industries are now on the track for a buoyant recovery," said the report from the U.N.'s Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).

Profits of the world's major engineering firms, with the exception of Japanese companies, have been soaring since the trough of 1992-1993, according to the report.

Investment goods sectors, and especially general and machine tools which were the worst hit during the early 1990s and saw production drops in key countries of up to 51 per cent, are leading the recovery.

The report, "World Engineering Industries and Automation: Performance and Prospects 1993-1995," said the huge declines in the recession years — especially in Japan and Germany — had created huge unemployment problems. Across the globe, companies were hit by large losses, often leading to bankruptcy and staff layoffs mainly affecting highly-skilled employees.

But now the bleak picture had radically changed. Investment goods industries in many countries were running close to capacity which would lead to further investment, according to the ECE analysts.

Booming economies in north and south America and south-east Asia and a robust recovery in western Europe and several eastern European countries "make the short- and medium-term prospects for the engineering industries look bright," they said.

However, the report warned, "the recovery will only have marginal effects on the rate of unemployment, at least as concerns western Europe."

Russian upper house votes to triple wages in defiance of IMF

MOSCOW (AFP) — The upper house of the Russian parliament voted for a near tripling of the minimum wage Friday in an act of defiance towards the IMF which President Boris Yeltsin is expected to veto.

The proposal to increase the minimum monthly wage from 20,500 rubles to 54,100 roubles (from $5 to $13) is seen as a major obstacle to the granting of a vital stand-by loan by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The decision, if applied, might add $750 million a month to public expenditure, making a mockery of the budget deficit target which is already viewed with scepticism by the IMF.

The IMF said Tuesday that it was withholding a stand-by loan of $6.45 billion, which has already been written into the draft budget for 1995, because it had not received satisfactory undertakings about economic reform and containment of the deficit.

"If this law comes into effect, the negotiations with the IMF will no longer make any sense, and nor would the pursuit of economic reforms, because this text would result in the total collapse of the budget for 1995," the main economic adviser to the president, Alexandre Livchits, warned at the beginning of the week.

"Whatever happens the president will veto this stupidity," First Vice Premier Anatoly Chubais said outside parliament a few days ago.

The First Deputy Finance Minister Vladimir Petrov said Friday that "the president will probably use his veto" and commented that the vote by the Federation Council was "populist" and showed a "lack of professionalism."

Mr. Yeltsin is still able to veto the law which might cost more than three trillion roubles ($750 million) per month, of which one-third would fall on the government and two-thirds on local authorities, according to estimates by the Russian government.

Such an increase in expenditure would destroy the government's target of containing the budget deficit to 7.8 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) this year.

The near tripling of the minimum age is not the only obstacle to the granting of the loan. The IMF is pressing for liberalisation of oil exports and for some changes in revenue and expenditure plans under the draft budget.

But it is considered to be a key pointer for experts from the IMF who are expected to return here at the end of February in another attempt to conclude a loan agreement. A first round of talks ended Monday.

IMF urges defence against new Mexico-style crisis

PARIS (R) — The managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has called for longer-term remedies to guard against a host of Mexico-style economic crises which could be waiting to erupt.

Michel Camdessus, speaking at a news conference, said early-warning signals would have to be improved and made it clear that the IMF may need more resources to fulfill its role as a backstop for countries rocked by financial problems.

"It is now necessary... to come up with a joint and in-depth analysis of what happened, and what it is that demanded such heavy intervention, so that longer-term remedies... are found for situations like this, which could indeed happen again," Mr. Camdessus said.

"Don't expect me to give you the list, in order, of the 10 similar cases which could crop up in the next 10 months," he added.

The IMF last week agreed a $17.8 billion loan for Mexico to help the country weather its severe cash crisis and bolster the world financial system. The standby loan was one of the cornerstones of the nearly $50 billion assistance programme for Mexico unveiled by U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Repeating comments he made in Washington last week, the IMF chief said the Mexican crisis may be just the first of a new style of crisis caused by the effect of fast-reacting globalised markets on economies with no exchange controls.

"We were confronted there with a major crisis, I believe it is the first crisis of the world ahead of us," he said. "It was not a crisis of the 20th century, but a crisis of the 21st century."

He said the international community should not come to hasty conclusions on how to react to the new economic order. Surveillance needed to be kept up.

As for the international community's capacity for response to crises, Mr. Camdessus warned that the IMF would ask its member countries for more cash.

For now the fund has sufficient liquidity to finance its day-to-day lending business and has a small margin of manoeuvre to act outside those bounds.

"The problem with abundant liquidity is that disappears rapidly," Mr. Camdessus said.

Nigeria has 8.5m jobless

LAGOS (AFP) — About 8.5 million Nigerian of working age are either jobless or under-employed, according to official unemployment statistics. This figure represents close to 10 per cent of the nation's population, officially put at 88.5 million. Most of those affected are unemployable since they lack either specific skills or academic qualifications, an official of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), said in an interview.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY FEBRUARY 12, 1995

By Thomas S. Pierson, Astrologer, Carroll Righter Foundation

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) It is important today that you exercise the greatest care in doing favours for partners, whether in business or personal life, be it concerning monetary or creative affairs.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) A bad day for gambling on anything or taking chances. Any civic or public affair needs to be handled very carefully, too; so that you do not irk higher-ups.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Get your tasks done quickly during the morning and then be kind to those who are helping you. However, don't use and air of bravado or do anything to irritate your constituents.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) You are now able to make better plans for recreation during weekends or during any spare time that you have and get those hobbies perfected.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Look for data that will assist you to get along better with associates and friends in the future. Go shopping this afternoon after you have studied your local paper for bargains.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Don't neglect to buy staples needed this day and be sure you drop in on a relative who loved you. Be gentle with all, not critical.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Surroundings or real estate the you owa require attention today and repairs that you would be wise to handle yourself. Be very kind with a loved one tonight, but not too extravagant.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Getting health and appearance improved is of prime importance to you today, so spare no time or expense in doing so. Then go after your most cherished desires this evening.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Be on guard tonight that you don't get into trouble with one who has powers over your affairs and well-being.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You are fortunate in having a good pal help you with whatever tasks you have on hand today that are too difficult to do alone so make sure you do this work together.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Be alert to credit affairs as well as to civic duties during the daytime. It is important that you prove you are a good citizen now for those who are taking a good look at you.

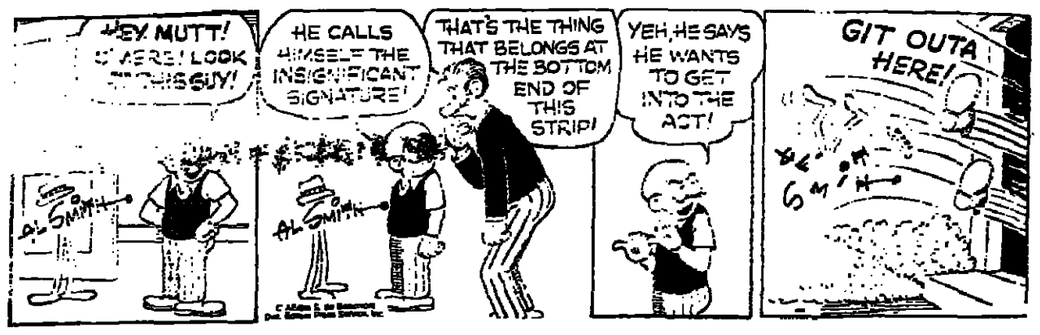
PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Much activity is fine now: meeting interesting people, getting close to nature, partaking in sports, etc. Stick to what is of proven worth in the evening.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

Peanuts

Andy Capp

Mutt'n'Jeff



THE BETTER HALF

By Glasbergen

"I worked at this restaurant in college. It was so fancy even the cockroaches used three different forks!"

JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

PINYP

RYDYL

MOARFT

BITLEG

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

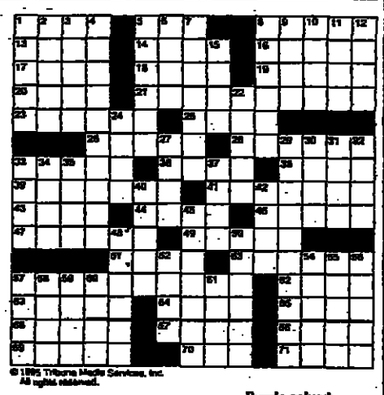
Answer here: _____ _____

(Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: LOUSY WEARY MISERY PLOWED

Answer: What the knitting teacher gave her students — "PURLS" OF WISDOM

THE Daily Crossword by William Canine



ACROSS
1 Bridge
5 Dundehead
8 Relinquish, as an office
13 Hebrew measure
14 Cork site
16 Equivocate
17 Beverage nut
18 British P.M., once
19 More elegant
20 Harrow rival
21 Mexican emperor
23 Washington
25 Elvis to some
26 NFL Hall-of-Famer Bobby
28 Insect
33 Rich Little, for one
36 Cobras
38 Bassoon cousin
39 Embarrassed
41 John and Yoko
43 Ostentation
44 Buddhist monk
46 Long-running Broadway play
47 Notorious bloodsucker
48 Loire Valley region
51 Augury
53 Combines
57 Infamous inquisitor
62 Allen: pref.
63 "Hiroshima, Mon —"
64 Borodin prince
65 Preminger
66 Crazed
67 Rough-hewn
68 Allowance for waste
69 Babble on
70 Woodsman's tool
71 Ali — (acutely attentive)

DOWN
1 Bankered
2 Overact
3 Lawbreaker
4 Composer of rhapsodies
5 Proper
6 Verdi heroine
7 College chiefs
8 Pollute
9 Wickedness
10 "The — Love"
11 The very —!
12 Fork-tailed bird
15 Novelist Bagnold
22 Telegraph man
24 Apiece
27 Nothing in Nogales
29 Woeful knight
30 — Ben Adhem
31 Not upper-class, in England
32 Hardy heroine
33 Trading center
34 Long-billed bird
35 Jane to Tarzan
37 Blueprint
40 — Iga
42 Gaseous element
45 Central American capital
48 Fount
50 Successor to 21A
52 Aqab prince
54 Tropical fish
55 Stage direction
56 Smudges
57 Pack down
58 — Khayyam
59 Columnist Barnet
60 Bow out
61 Connecticut senator

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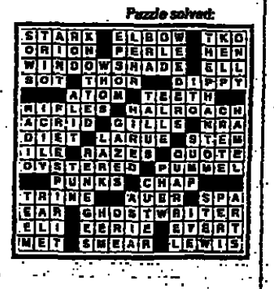
Puzzle solved:



هكذا من الأصل

business daily beat

A review of economic news from the Arabic press

Trading in 'burned goods' generates 200% profit

The first part of this story was published Saturday, Feb. 11, 1995

Saleh Al Sallal, a merchant who buys and sells "burned products", affirms that trading in this line is better than importing. He claims the importing business would generate between 10 to 20 per cent profit but trading in "burned products" can bring a 200 per cent if it is bought in cash and sold in instalments.

He adds that "burned products" are no longer electrical ones but has also become carpets and bedrooms.

Salim Al Dabouqi says he is an importer and does not deal in "al souq al mahrouq" although he is suffering from it. He explains that he imported television sets which cost him JD 320 each but he cannot sell them although he might get rid of them at a loss so as not to keep the products in the shop.

Mr. Dabouqi says if each factory or importer restricts sales to honest traders who pay the price in cash there will no longer be a "burned market".

Ghazi Dheeb, owner of Sob Laban Establishment, says the "burned market" can be stopped if the manufacturers and importers stop flooding the market with large quantities of goods. He explains that if a trader has the capabilities to sell five products and he gets 50 he will be forced to "burn the products" to pay his obligations.

Mr. Dheeb points out that the merchants are aware of the true price of electrical products but the ordinary people are demanding the "burned price" and, as such, all consumers are going to the "burned market."

He adds that people are selling "burned products" whether at the city centre, at the suburbs and even at villages.

Fayez Al Buraie says that 75 per cent of the market in Jordan is a "burned market" and that he buys and sells burned products" like everybody else.

Saeed Al Qaisi accuses employees of being involved in this type of trade.

He gave the example of the gas heaters which some companies sold to government employees in installments. Although an employee was in need of one heater, he bought four in installments and sold three of them at a "burned prices" to raise cash.

Mr. Al Qaisi stressed that "Al Souq Al Mahrouq" is causing great damage to the traders. It has become like a bourse with prices moving up or down within hours and sometimes within minutes, he said.

Mahmoud Al Abbadi from Salt explains yet another track being followed by traders. He says:

Let us suppose that a merchant buys goods worth JD 50,000 from a supplier and another JD 50,000 worth of goods from a second supplier and goods worth JD 100,000 from a third source. "Burning" these goods at half the cost price would generate JD 100,000 of cash which the merchant can take to banks and shop there for credits in exchange for the cash he presents as a deposit or security (against facilities). And, more goods keep flooding the maket (Al Dustour).

☆☆ An anouncement by the Aqaba Regional Authority invites investors to apply for various opportunities available in the southern share area of Aqaba. Investment opportunities include setting up hotels, spas and touristic villages, restaurants, swimming pools, play grounds, golf course, sports areas, diving clubs, yacht clubs, camping sites, amausement cities, zoos and any other touristic, sportif or amusement ventures (Al Ra'i).

Pakistan woos investment in electronics, refining palm oil

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — The Pakistan government has unveiled a package of tax concessions and other incentives to attract domestic and foreign investment to launch the electronics, chemicals and palm oil industries in the country.

The country's Board of Investment (B.I.), headed by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, also invited foreign companies to invest in 12 special industrial zones set up in the country.

B.I. Secretary Mohibullah Khan told reporters that investors undertaking palm oil refining projects would get total exemption from sales tax on curd palm oil imports, which mainly come from Malaysia.

Pakistan, which imports 1.6 million tonnes of palm oil, could save $50 per tonne if it had refining ability, Mr. Khan said, adding that local cultivation of plam oil trees would also be promoted.

Outlining the concessions, the B.I. official said import duty on components used in electronics software and hardware had been reduced from 70 per cent to 10 and 15 per cent.

No income tax will be levied on profits earned from the export of electronic goods.

Commercial banks and state-run financial institutions will extend soft loans and a special cell will be set up at the Export Promotion Bureau to facilitate export of electronic goods.

Abu Dhabi building sector seen buoyant in '95

ABU DHABI (R) — Commercial building activity in Abu Dhabi will stay buoyant in 1995 despite a fairly cheerless outlook for Arab Gulf economies as a whole, an economic official has said.

"I don't expect a lot of change from last year. Replacement of old buildings will continue," said Humaid Bin Karam, undersecretary at Abu Dhabi's Economic Department.

"Rents may stabilise but only towards the end of the year. Flat prices are still high," he told Reuters in an interview.

A construction boom continued through 1994 in Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and in the neighbouring emirate of Dubai despite weak oil prices, the Arab Gulf state's main export.

Some analysts do not expect oil prices to improve much in 1995 but new commercial buildings, which get soft government loans in Abu Dhabi, are still rising in large numbers.

"The government is trying to cut down spending, but spending on essential items is not going to change," said Mr. Karam, adding: "Offsets will also bring people here."

Foreign arms makers who win UAE defence contracts are obliged to reinvest part of a deal's value in joint venture offset projects with local partners.

The soft loans for building projects are intended to help spread oil income through the economy. Construction work also generates business for materials suppliers, banks and insurers.

Estate agents in Dubai, a regional trading hub and one of the seven UAE states, say commercial rents there fell more than 10 per cent at the end of 1994 in a saturated market, but this may be a short-term correction in an upward trend.

More than 40 per cent of the UAE's two million people live in Abu Dhabi, by far the richest of the seven emirates. It pumps about 85 per cent of the UAE's daily oil production of 2.161 million barrels.

The construction industry in Abu Dhabi is supported by a need to replace buildings put up in a hurry during the oil boom of the 1970s and worn out by the Gulf's hot and humid climate.

"The quality of buildings is improving and that will keep prices up," Mr. Karam said in reference to dozens of new smart office and residential buildings.

Another factor which will buoy the industry in 1995 is the growth of large residential suburbs outside Abu Dhabi city.

New flats are usually bigger and have central air-conditioning instead of noisy and cumbersome window units. Many new buildings also have swimming pools, squash courts and gymnasiums.

As old buildings are demolished in central Abu Dhabi and replaced by modern ones, their low-earning, mostly foreign inhabitants will move out to find affordable housing.

"In 1995 I see a shift from low-quality housing. Asian families will move out of Abu Dhabi," Mr. Karam said.

About 75 per cent of the UAE population are expatriate workers, mainly from the Indian subcontinent and poorer Arab states.

Mr. Karam said some UAE officials are keen to see a change in the population balance but said housing policy was not being used as a way of achieving this.

"The government wants to give them better conditions and get rid of these ugly old buildings... but there's no policy as such to drive them a certain way. It's a free market," he pointed out.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHMEISANI
TELEPHONE: 660170 / 663170
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 11/02/1995

COMPANY'S NAME	NO. OF SHARES TRADED	VALUE TRADED JD	PREV. CLOSING PRICE	CLOSING PRICE
ARAB BANK PLc	1140	210765	184.500	185.000
JORDAN NATIONAL BANK	5400	22880	4.150	4.260
JORDAN NATIONAL BANK / NEW	4950	20446	4.100	4.140
MIDDLE EAST INVESTMENT BANK.	850	1212	1.440	1.420
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BANK	1000	2650	2.650	2.650
THE HOUSING BANK	1300	7779	5.950	6.000
JORDAN KUWAIT BANK	1770	5298	2.950	2.990
JORDAN GULF BANK	3700	5209	1.370	1.430
JORDAN ISLAMIC BANK	4635	17389	3.710	3.770
BEIT ELMAL SAVING&INVESTMENT FOR HOUSING	750	2310	3.050	3.100
AMMAN BANK FOR INVESTMENT	14850	19255	1.290	1.300
ARAB BANKING CORPORATION/JORDAN	500	2000	4.150	4.000
PHILADELPHIA INVESTMENT BANK.	2450	3484	1.400	1.430
BANKS SECTOR	43295	320675	INDEX NUMBER: 158.09 CHANGE	: +0.61%
JORDAN FRENCH INSURANCE	100	235	2.290	2.350
INSURANCE SECTOR	100	235	INDEX NUMBER: 135.94 CHANGE	: +0.28%
JORDANIAN ELECTRIC POWER	2150	3178	1.460	1.490
JORDANIAN ELECTRIC POWER /NEW	17050	23877	1.360	1.410
ARAB INTERNATIONAL HOTELS	300	1425	4.700	4.750
JORDAN NATIONAL SHIPPING LINES	8250	26584	3.150	3.250
NATIONAL PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	3750	8070	2.110	2.160
JORDAN PRESS FOUNDATION / ALRA'I	100	1165	11.950	11.650
UNITED MIDDLE EAST & COMMODORE HOTELS	283	663	2.270	2.350
ARAB INTER. FOR INVESTMENT & EDUCATION	13400	49030	3.600	3.700
SERVICES SECTOR	45283	113990	INDEX NUMBER: 129.84 CHANGE	: +1.44%
JORDAN TOBACCO & CIGARETTES	50	1639	34.500	32.780
THE JORDAN CEMENT FACTORIES	7443	21952	2.950	2.960
THE ARAB POTASH/NEW	600	3000	5.050	5.000
JORDAN PETROLEUM REFINERY	2614	24767	9.400	9.500
THE JORDAN WORSTED MILLS	3150	23630	7.450	7.550
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL MANUFACTURING	38500	166630	4.160	4.370
JORDAN CERAMIC INDUSTRIES	125	725	5.900	5.800
SPINNING & WEAVING	1650	4208	2.540	2.550
RAFIA INDUSTRIES	2300	6390	2.730	2.770
DAR AL DAWA DEVELOPMENT & INVESTMENT	3964	31859	7.780	8.000
ARAB INVESTMENT & INTERNATIONAL TRADE	6500	6175	.930	.950
ARAB ALUMINIUM INDUSTRY	350	2380	6.700	6.800
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	34400	26228	.740	.760
INTERMEDIATE PETRO-CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES	2550	6130	2.370	2.400
JORDAN ROCKWOOL INDUSTRIES	1850	2610	1.400	1.410
ALADDIN INDUSTRIES	100	425	4.200	4.250
JORDAN INDUSTRIES & MATCH/JINCO	3000	2328	.780	.770
NATIONAL CABLE & WIRE MANUFACTURING	2150	10428	4.850	4.850
ARAB CENTER FOR PHARM. & CHEMICALS	1100	2831	2.520	2.600
KAWTHER INVESTMENT	250	438	1.700	1.750
UNIVERSAL MODERN INDUSTRIES	1550	6220	3.960	4.010
JORDAN INDUSTRIAL RESOURCES CO.	5950	11766	1.890	1.980
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR	120196	363230	INDEX NUMBER: 123.58 CHANGE	: +0.96%
GRAND TOTAL	208874	798129	INDEX NUMBER: 141.79 CHANGE	: +0.79%

NO. OF TRADED SHARES IN PARALLEL MARKET : 88985
VALUE TRADED IN PARALLEL MARKET : 116038

Kidnapping for ransom becomes 'industry' in Colombia

BOGOTA (AFP) — Kidnapping has become a veritable industry in Colombia, with one person abducted and held for ransom every six hours, according to a report by a victims association.

A law calling for 60 years in prison for kidnapping had failed to stem the crisis, according to Justice Minister Nestor Humberto Martinez, who called abductions "the worst and most painful of crimes."

A total of 1,378 people were kidnapped in 1994, a 30 per cent increase from the previous year, according to the victims organisation Free Country.

Few of the criminals are caught — only 86 were arrested and jailed in 1994 — which means that about 90 per cent of the kidnappings go unpunished, according to the report.

Areas most affected include the cities of Cali, Ibague and the capital Bogota.

"Free Country," which was organised by former abduction victims, said the number of kidnappings reported to officials probably only represented 40 per cent of those crimes, with many families too frightened to notify authorities.

Police officials have said nearly 5,000 abductions may have been carried out in the first six months of 1994 alone.

About half of the crimes have been blamed on guerrilla organisations trying to free their comrades or obtain funds to buy arms.

EU reviews quotas, seeks $500 million in subsidies for EU films

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AP) — Wary of Hollywood's grip on Europe, the EU executive commission has proposed close to $500 million in subsidies for Europe's audiovisual sector between 1996-2000, a doubling of current aid.

It said the aid, worth 400 million European Currency Units (ECUs) would pay for training, programme development and distribution to help bring more European films to cinemas and television screens.

Also, it took its first look at tightening quotas on imported films and television shows shown across the 15-nation trading bloc, but announced no decision.

More than 80 per cent of films now shown in EU cinemas are non-European in origin, meaning mostly made-in-USA. Up to 60 per cent of broadcast time on EU television is non-European.

Raising the European content in cinemas and on television here has become a sore point in EU-U.S. relations.

In 1989, the EU launched a quota system requiring EU stations to use at least 51 per cent of air-time to show European programmes.

Now, France wants to increase those quotas, arguing European programmers cannot compete with the Hollywood machine.

EU Audiovisual Commissioner Marcelino Oreja said the new commission, which took office last month, could chart a strategy combining subsidies with already-existing quotas.

At a press conference, he denied the proposed new aid package was designed to placate those demanding higher quotas, such as France.

"I'm not trying to trade one point off against another," he said.

Yet, he said the quota law "probably will be changed." He said the commission must decide on the type, geographic area, and time limit of quotas, as well as to which types of programmes they would apply.

Mr. Oreja and other commissioners suggested a likely outcome would be to retain the quotas, but to add a timetable for phasing them out.

Regardless of how they decide to protect Europe's audiovisual industry, Mr. Oreja said commissioners agreed on the need to hike funding, which has produced award-winning movies in recent years.

The proposed subsidies must be approved by the 15 EU governments.

They would be used to develop television programmes with a "European dimension" and to train filmmakers. But the lion's share — some 260 million ECUs ($320 million) goes to setting up a 15-nation distribution network for EU-made programmes.

France's desire to raise the broadcasting quotas has caused friction inside the EU. Two weeks ago, Commission President Jacques Santer suggested quotas were not the best way to protect European filmmakers.

Under French pressure, he later toned this down.

Mr. Santer's commission appears divided over a tightening of quotas. Mr. Oreja would not reveal how commissioners lined up on the issue, but sources close to the meeting portrayed a fairly even split.

Throughout world trade talks in 1993, EU trade chief, Sir Leon Brittan, fought off French efforts to exempt films from the accord with a "cultural exception."

Industry Commissioner Martin Bangemann, who is German, also opposes protectionism on principle. During their first debate, the "no" camp included Britain's Neil Kinnock, Italy's Mario Monti, Austria's Franz Fischler, Ireland's Padraig Flynn and Hans van Den Broke of the Netherlands.

In the "yes" corner were French commissioners Edith Cresson and Yves de Silguy, Belgium's Karel van Miert, Finland's Eri Liikanen, Germany's Monika Wulf Mathies, the sources said.

The commission debate warms up the plate for a meeting of EU culture ministers in Bordeaux, France, next Monday and Tuesday.

France, now holding the EU's rotating presidency, wants its partners to take a firm position by early April.

Mr. Oreja said he would try to have a proposal ready April 3.

Jordan Times
Tel: 667171

Financial Markets — Jordan Times in co-operation with Cairo Amman Bank

U.S. Dollar in International Markets

Currency	New York Close Date 9/2/95	New York Close Date 10/2/95
Sterling Pound*	1.5575	1.5635
Deutsche Mark	1.5283	1.5190
Swiss Franc	1.2933	1.2823
French Franc	5.2910	5.2585
Japanese Yen	98.90	98.90
European Currency Unit	1.2345	1.2450

* USD Per STC
** Foreign Opening @ 8:30 a.m. GMT

Eurocurrency Interest Rates — Date: 11/2/1995

Currency	1 MTH	3 MTHS	6 MTHS	12 MTHS
U.S. Dollar	5.81	6.00	6.31	6.87
Sterling Pound	6.31	6.43	6.81	7.43
Deutsche Mark	4.75	4.81	5.00	5.43
Swiss Franc	3.37	3.68	3.93	4.25
French Franc	5.37	5.56	5.87	6.37
Japanese Yen	2.06	2.06	2.12	2.25
European Currency Unit	6.66	5.87	6.18	6.75

Interbank bid rates for amounts exceeding U.S. Dollars 1,000,000 or equivalent.

Central Bank of Jordan Exchange Rate Bulletin — Date: 11/2/1995

Currency	Bid	Offer
U.S. Dollar	0.7000	0.7020
Sterling Pound	1.0919	1.0974
Deutsche Mark	0.4600	0.4623
Swiss Franc	0.5452	0.5479
French Franc	0.1330	0.1337
Japanese Yen*	0.7070	0.7105
Dutch Guilder	0.4107	0.4128
Swedish Krona	******	******
Italian Lira*	0.0434	0.0436
Belgian Franc	******	******

* Per 100

Other Currencies — Date: 11/2/1995

Currency	Bid	Offer
Bahraini Dinar	1.8410	1.8600
Lebanese Lira*	0.041975	0.042850
Saudi Riyal	0.1860	0.1875
Kuwaiti Dinar	2.3200	2.3650
Qatari Riyal	0.1911	0.1935
Egyptian Pound	0.2000	0.2130
Omani Riyal	1.8070	1.8290
UAE Dirham	0.1900	0.1920
Greek Drachma*	0.2815	0.2875

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Reno Air Games

Johnson, Joyner-Kersee set records

RENO (AP) — Record-setting performances by Michael Johnson and Jackie Joyner-Kersee stole the spotlight in a meet dominated by glitz and gambling.

Johnson set a world indoor record of 44.97 seconds in the 400 metres Friday night, finishing off a Reno Air Games that opened with Joyner-Kersee breaking her own American indoor mark in the 50-metre hurdles.

Johnson, who has never lost in 12 indoor 400s, got out to a blazing start and won easily. The old record was 45.02, set by fellow American Danny Everett in 1992.

"I haven't been on the boards since 1991. I don't really like it, but now I have a world record. It's kind of strange," said Johnson, the world's top-ranked runner at 200 and 400 metres. "I feel good. I wanted to give the people in Reno something to remember."

Johnson began his race at odds of 1-5 in what was believed to be the first non-Olympic meet in the United States to allow legal betting.

Joyner-Kersee, a five-time Olympic medallist, had a time of 6.67 seconds despite seeming to ease up at the end of the infrequently run event. The world record is 6.58 seconds, set in 1988 by Cornelia Oschkenat of the former East Germany.

The previous American best of 6.84 was set by Kim McKenzie in 1989 and matched by Joyner-Kersee in 1993 in Los Angeles.

Joyner-Kersee, an asthmatic, said the 1,370 metre elevation and the thinner air of Reno may have helped her set the record.

"I think it helped a little bit," she said. "But as far as my breathing, it didn't help at all."

Joyner-Kersee came back later in the meet to win the long jump with a leap of 6.79 metres.

Maria Mutola kept alive her unbeaten streak in the women's 800 metres, finishing in 2 minutes, 0.95 seconds to win by nearly six seconds. The native of Mozambique has not lost, indoors or outdoors, since August 1992.

Gwen Torrence won the women's 200 metres despite feeling so sick she threw up after the race. Torrence had the flue and was trying to get used to braces placed on her teeth on Wednesday.

"I told my husband I didn't think I was going to make it," she said. "I'm weak and I've lost a few pounds. I thought if I could pull out a win at my worst, I can win at my best."

Regina Jacobs held off Olympic 1,500-metre champion Hassiba Boulmerka to win the women's mile, finishing in a relatively slow 4 minutes, 51.62 seconds. Boulmerka was 1.40 seconds behind.

In the men's mile, three-time U.S. indoor champion Marcus O'Sullivan pulled away from the field in the final lap to win in 4.01.89.

Henry Neal, who won the 50-metre dash in the Millrose Games last week at New York, held off Jon Drummond and a field that included Dennis Mitchell to win again Friday in 5.63 seconds — the third-fastest ever by an American. Drummond was second in 5.72 and Mitchell was fourth in 5.57.

Olympic gold medallist and two-time world indoor champion Mike Conley finished just eight in the triple jump, leaping 15.47 metres. The winner was Kenny Harrison at 17.05 metres.

The competition was preceded by an elaborate opening ceremony, complete with lasers and spotlights, reflecting the sport's made-for-TV efforts to market itself more aggressively in the United States. The meet was to be shown on tape Saturday on the NBC television network.

The athletes waved to the crowd as they were introduced to music. Joyner-Kersee was introduced last, and her peers formed a circle and bowed to her in respect — forcing the modest Joyner-Kersee to hide her head in embarrassment.

Odds were posted on seven of the 16 events in the meet.

The betting was conducted at the Eldorado Hotel and Casino, one of the meet's sponsors. Participating athletes were warned before the meet by USA Track and Field officials not to bet on any of the races.

Betting was light, with only about $7,000 wagered on the races about an hour before the meet began.

The meet is the second of five events of the Indoor Grand Prix, which began last weekend with the Millrose Games.

U.S. sprinter Michael Johnson (centre) takes the curve in the men's 200 metres (AFP photo)

Top athletes meet in L.A.

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Jon Drummond ranked No. 3 internationally in the 100-metre dash in 1994, and he expects even better things this year.

Drummond, a former Texas Christian University standout who set a personal best of 9.99 seconds last year, is scheduled to run the 50 metres in the Sunkist Invitational at the Los Angeles Sports Arena.

"I think I'm as good as anyone else in the world right now in the 100," Drummond said. "And I expect to improve my personal record again this year."

He will be matched in the dash against Mike Marsh, the 1992 Olympic champion at 200 metres. Also in the sprint is high school senior Bryan Howard of California, who set a national prep record of 5.69 in the Sunkist a year ago.

Jackie Joyner-Kersee, a three-time Olympic gold medalist who had an outstanding 1994 season, will run in the 50-metre hurdles.

She faces a field that includes Lynda Tolbert-Goode, the bronze medalist in the 1993 World Championships in the high hurdles. Joyner-Kersee finished one-hundredth of a second ahead of Tolbert-Goode in the 60-metre hurdles a week ago at the Millrose Games.

Said Aouita, the dominant middle-distance runner in the world in the late 1980s, is making a comeback after missing 2½-years because of a variety of injuries.

Jackie Joyner-Kersee

Aouita, 35, an Olympic gold medallist in the 5,000 in 1984 and a bronze winner in the 800 at Seoul in 1988, formerly held worlds record at 1500, 2000, 3000 and 5000 meters.

His time of 3 minutes, 29.46 seconds in 1985 still ranks as the second-fastest 1500 ever, behind only Noureddine Morceli of Algeria, with a 3:28.86 in 1993.

Jim Spivey, Niall Bruton of Ireland and Jason Pyrah will provide the major competition for Aouita in the mile at the sports arena.

The men's 50-metre hurdles features the first and second-ranked Americans in the high hurdles in 1994, Mark Crear and Robert Reading, both are Southern Cal graduates and crear set a personal best of 13.07 in the 110-metre hurdles and reading ran a career best of 13.34.

Other featured events include the women's 880 yards, the men's 3,000, the pole vault, and the men's 500 yards.

World champion Maria Mutola of Mozambique, unbeaten in 30 races stretching back over the past two years, will compete in the 880 yards. She was second in the track and field news voting for 1994 woman athlete of the year behind Joyner-Kersee.

Reuben Reina, a former National Collegiate Athletic Association cross-country champion from the University of Arkansas, will run in the men's 3,000 among his competitors will be University of Arizona star Martin Keino, son of legendary Kenyan distance runner Kip Keino and the 1994 NCAA cross country tit-list.

Nigeria to appeal FIFA decision

LAGOS (AFP) — As anger over FIFA's decision to cancel the World Youth Cup grew here Saturday the head of the Nigerian Football Federation (NFF) said he would appeal the decision.

NFF president Emeka Omeruah added that he was not convinced by the reasons put forward by FIFA.

Football's world governing body announced Friday that the risk to health had been behind the decision and not fears that Nigeria was not up to staging the tournament.

"The World Youth Cup due to take place in Nigeria has had to be unavoidably called off. FIFA's emergency committee was forced to make the decision after the health situation worsened during the last few weeks," it announced.

A statement said the outbreak of cholera and meningitis had occurred at Kaduna and Enugu.

The announcement has unleashed a backlash against FIFA. Babashola Rhodes, head of the country's National Sports Council (NSC), accused FIFA of insulting black Africa.

And the Nigeria press was also scathing in its condemnation.

"FIFA stabs Nigeria in the back" was the headline of the popular Daily Times.

"We believe that there has been a wicked conspiracy against Nigeria and her aspirations to host the current FIFA/Coca Cola Cup championship," said the paper in a front page comment piece.

The Champion newspaper also claimed the decision was a plot against the West African country.

"Without mincing words, we want to make it absolutely clear that this design of FIFA's is totally unacceptable to Nigeria and the black world in general. Indeed any attempt to take away the championship from Nigeria must be seen for what it is: A racist and political ploy to further humiliate the black continent," said the paper in an editorial.

FIFA's decision to cancel the tournament comes less than two months after a critical report about Nigeria's preparations for the championship was presented.

FIFA officials who visited Nigeria in December reported back that preparations for the Cup were a shambles.

Everything from training facilities to playing surfaces were not up to acceptable standards and FIFA vice-president Jack Warner is reported to have told Nigeria to take drastic action or the tournament would be held elsewhere.

Recent reports from Lagos revealed that the FIFA President Joao Havelange had called on Nigeria to withdraw its candidacy because of organisational problems.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Belgium's FC Liege $8 million in debt

BRUSSELS (R) — Belgian club FC Liege said on Friday it is $8 million in debt, has stadium unfit for public use and is close to bankruptcy. "We've got a 250 million franc ($8 million) debt and we lose an additional million francs ($32,000) every week," said FC Liege director Pierre Delahaye. "If we wait another two months, it will be too late. It's now or never." Liege are bottom of the first division. Delahaye said informal merger talks with another Belgian first division club, Seraing, were underway. "We're also open to any possible takeover Proposal. But so far there hasn't been any clear one," he added.

Kamsky forces draw against Salov

SANGHINAGER, India (AP) — American grandmaster Gata Kamsky drew in 107 moves against Valery Salov of Russia in the Fourth game of the World Chess Championship Semifinals Saturday. The draw gives Kamsky a 3-1 lead over Salov in the 10-game tournament in this southern Indian City. Salov started cautiously and chose a variation of the Nimzo-Indian defence to gain time. He maintained a slight advantage when the opening phase of the game was over and middlegame fight began. Kamsky's moves were complicated and ended up helping Salov. The game was adjourned with Kamsky sealing his 61st move and experts considered it as dead drawn position. Kamsky needed another 47 moves to secure a draw.

Dallas receiver signs $15m contract

IRVING, TEXAS (AP) — A five-year, $15 million contract will make Dallas Cowboys wide receiver Michael Irvin the highest-paid receiver in U.S. National Football League history. Irvin, a four-time Pro Bowl selection who has led the Cowboys in receiving the past four season, is getting a $5 million, upfront bonus in the deal which beats a four-year, $11 million contract signed by Tim Brown of the Los Angeles Raiders. Irvin, the Cowboys' fourth all-time leading receiver with 6,935 yards, has earned $1.25 million in each of the past three years.

Uncertainty surrounds Fogdoe after accident

STOCKHOLM (R) — Doctors said Friday they would not know for several days, or even weeks, if Swedish Alpine skiing star Thomas Fogdoe would be paralysed after a training accident earlier this week. Fogdoe, World Cup slalom champion in 1993, was transferred to a normal ward at the University Hospital in Umea, northern Sweden, from the intensive care unit where he had been since he was admitted on Tuesday. Fodgoe was training with the rest of the Swedish downhill team at Are — 300 kms from Umea — when he entered a wood and apparently crashed into a tree, eye witnesses said.

Foreman may retire after fighting Schulz

OSLO (R) — George Foreman, the oldest heavyweight boxing champion in history, said Friday he may retire from the ring after his title fight against German Axel Schulz in April. Foreman, 46, also said he hoped to settle a dispute with the World Boxing Association (WBA) over his planned match against Schulz, who is 20 years his junior. "There is a chance that I'd wait around for Mike Tyson to get out and get himself back into shape," Foreman, asked about the future, told reporters during a promotion trip to Oslo. "But, if he doesn't, probably the fight with Axel Schulz could be my last boxing match. I got things to do. I just can't hang around and box too long."

Blackpool owner charged with rape

LONDON (R) — British businessman Owen Oyston, a former media tycoon and owner of Blackpool football club, was charged on Friday with four rapes, three indecent assaults and conspiracy to procure women, police said. Detectives spent nearly two days interviewing Oyston, 60, after taking him from his home in Lancaster, Northern England, to a police station in Manchester. Oyston, who began his career as a sewing machine salesman, made his fortune in the property business and later founded a media empire in the northwest of England.

Dodgers near deal with Japanese star

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Hideo Nomo, the winningest pitcher in Japanese baseball over the past five seasons, is being courted by six U.S. teams but is reportedly nearing agreement on a deal with the Los Angeles Dodgers. Nomo retired from Japanese baseball after five exceptional seasons with the Kintetsu Buffaloes, opening the way for the right-handed to join the North American major leagues. The Los Angeles Daily News reported Friday that there was an agreement between the Dodgers and Nomo on a minor-league deal that included a two million-dollar bonus. Team spokesman Derrick Hall said the story was premature. "We have had a couple of meetings with Nomo," Hall said. "An offer has been made. As far as the negotiations are concerned, we have no comment."

Ex-champ Lewis returns in May

LAS VEGAS (AFP) — Former world heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis of Britain will fight Lionel Butler here on May 13 in a World Boxing Council bout to decide a mandatory title challenger for later this year. U.S. promoter Dan Duva paid $1.6 million for the rights to the bout in bidding Thursday in Mexico, outspending Don King. King had hoped to stage the fight along with the WBC title bout between Oliver McCall and ex-champ Larry Holmes here on April 8. McCall, who beat Lewis for the title last September, would fight the Lewis-Butler winner in September.

Boxer admits shooting gun at party

PHOENIX (AFP) — Former world boxing champion Michael Carabjal pleaded guilty here Friday to recklessly firing a gun at a party and was ordered to perform 300 hours of community service. Carbajal, an Olympic silver medalist, was also put on two years probation. He will continue his work with youth groups in a slum neighbourhood here. Carbajal, 26, pleaded guilty to a charge of reckless firing, a felony which carries a maximum one-year sentence. He is set to serve a 30-day sentence in August but good probation behaviour will likely mean he will not have to serve any jail time. Police charged Carbajal with firing 12 shots into the air last September after he was ejected from a party.

Sports in Antarctica require adjustments

ROSS SEA ICE SHELF, Antarctica (AP) — Golf has its "winter rules." Antarctica has its extreme versions for all kinds of games: softball, skiing, rugby, and yes, golf too.

Die-hard Antarctic athletes are constantly making adaptions to the uniquely cold, dry environment; some rules border on the surreal.

If you're golfing, you don't merely improve your lie should the ball find its way to the ground under repair.

Standing water, leaves and other hazards normal golfers confront in late season are nothing compared to skuas — large, carnivorous Antarctic sea gulls.

New Zealanders from the Scott Base used to challenge the Americans at McMurdo Station to a periodic "Masters Classic Golf Tournament."

One of the rules of the "Masters Classic" was that if a hungry, curious skua picked up your ball, you had to play it from where he dropped it — after he realized it wasn't edible.

Players used coloured golf balls, since white ones tend to get lost on the icy course.

The "Masters Classic" hasn't been played between Scott Base and McMurdo for a few years, but McMurdo held a golf tournament Jan. 29 on the ice runway, Williams field, which was renamed the "Ice Pines Course" for the day.

But Golf is only one of the games in which athletes way down under have had to change the rules to accommodate the conditions.

If your playing softball — like baseball and a popular recreation game with Americans — and someone hits a long home run, let it go. Any attempt to chase it down could be deadly.

The edge of the outfield is beyond the solidly frozen "ice wharf" where ships land supplies in summer, and on the Rose Sea ice, riddled with crevasses that are often concealed under the latest dusting of snow.

An outfield who plays deep left field could easily plunge into the freezing water. A man loses consciousness in less than two minutes and is dead in a few more.

Rule number one of the McMurdo Station's Antarctic Softball League: "Please note ice is very unstable, there is no ball retrieving onto the ice."

The softball season is flexible, depending on the progress of the U.S. Coast Guard icebreakers each summer. Rule number two is: "League will end when wharf is needed for ship offload operation."

The Kiwis and Yanks do get into a rugby scrum between the bases now and then. Souvenir rugby jerseys can be bought in sporting goods shops in Christchurch, New Zealand, the regional headquarters of the U.S. and New Zealand polar programmes.

The sporting highlight of the year at McMurdo is the annual Scott's Hut run, a 7-kilometre 4 road race over the volcanic cinders of Ross island. About 200 of the 1,200 Americans and 80 or so Scott Base New Zealanders joined the latest race on Jan. 22.

The start of the race was signalled by a bagpiper, under perpetually sunny Antarctic summer skies, with temperatures hovering around the freezing point.

The runners streaked off toward the first checkpoint and landmark, the hut built by British Capt. Robert F. Scott in 1902 during his first Antarctic expedition.

Lazy Weddell seals sunbathed on the Ross Sea ice near the hut; a few languidly rolled over to gaze at the runners dressed in fluorescent colours. Among the most colourful were some of the New Zealanders, who walked the course toting a wheelbarrow full of beer.

Antarctica is, in many ways, a skier's dream, and McMurdo rents cross-country skis for just a few dollars a week.

But skiers must stick to marked, flagged trails; the snow fields are treacherous, and people who stray just 100 metres (few hundred feet) from the trail have been killed in plunges down crevasses hidden under fresh snow.

Scott base runs the world's southernmost ski hill, complete with a 200-metre (600-foot) tow rope looped around the rear wheel of a truck so skiers can glide uphill. People also careen down the Scott Base ski run on snowboards, inner tubes and toboggans.

Some of the McMurdo scientists and support staff burn off extra energy in fierce basketball and volleyball games in the gymnasium. Erick Chang of the National Science Foundation said broken bones from these games are the most common emergencies that the base hospital has to deal with.

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Courier, Chang in San Jose semis

SAN JOSE (Agencies) — Three years to the day he first reached tennis' top ranking, Jim Courier kept on track in his quest to climb back by getting past Jim Grabb 6-1, 7-6 (7-5) Friday night at the San Jose Open.

Instead of dwelling on his past glory, Courier just wants to think about what's happening now.

"I was happy to end it in two sets," Courier said. "Jim just played better in the second set. It wasn't a matter of me playing worse."

Courier, now ranked 11th, earned a meeting with second seed and No. 6 Michael Chang, a hearty rival over the years, in the semifinals. Top seed Andre Agassi will face fifth seed Malivai Washington in the afternoon semifinal.

"There won't be any surprises," Courier said about playing Chang again. "We know each other's game really well."

Grabb, who had 24 aces in his last win, managed just one against Courier. Still, he had the chance to force a split set when he went up 5-4 in the tiebreaker before Courier won three straight points to take the match.

All four semifinalists have advanced without losing a set in three tournament matches. Courier is 13-1 in match play this year, winning 35 of 37 sets.

The second-ranked Agassi, who held off Brian MacPhie 6-4, 6-3 said he didn't feel like he was playing somebody ranked 374th.

"To me, he's a much better player than his ranking shows," Agassi said. "I felt like I had to stay focused the entire match. I felt if I stayed on him, good things would happen."

Agassi had never before faced MacPhie, a 22-year-old hometown boy from San Jose who had never faced a player in the top 10.

In each set, Agassi had to wait until 3-3 to break the determined MacPhie.

"You know how those matches turn here," Agassi said. "I was down three or four break points in the first set. I couldn't afford to let him get the adrenaline going."

Agassi has won 25 of his last 26 matches against players not in the top 100.

Now he'll face Washington, who beat Bryan Shelton 6-2, 6-1, ranked 40th, Washington broke a three-game losing streak to Agassi when he beat him 6-4, 7-5 last year in Atlanta. They have not met since.

Chang fought off serves by Greg Rusedski that reached a record 137 mph (220 kph), holding on to win two topsy-turvy tiebreakers 7-6 (8-6), 7-6 (10-8).

Jim Courier

Sabatini defeats Rubin in Chicago

In Chicago Gabriela Sabatini's biggest scare didn't come on the court. It came a short time later, after she'd beaten Chanda Rubin to secure a spot in the Ameritech Cup semifinals.

Sabatini got out of her chair to leave a post-match news conference Friday night and slipped. It took her a couple of moments to get up but she emerged unscathed.

"I'm ok," she said, getting back on her feet to do another interview. Tournament officials were the happiest of all to hear those remarks.

Sabatini, the tournament's top draw and its second seed, beat Rubin 7-6 (7-5), 6-4 and credited good net play. She won 11 points in 16 forays to the net.

"I was trying to come in to put pressure on her. I had a lot of success in the beginning and I kept doing it," Sabatini said. "I got some b g points at the net in the tiebreaker."

Sabatini was to meet third-seeded Magdalena Maleeva in the semifinals at the University of Illinois at Chicago Pavilion.

Maleeva, who drew a first-round bye and then got a second-round walkover, finally got to play Friday and defeated Belgium's Laurence Courtois 6-3, 6-3. The other semifinal pitted Zina Garrison Jackson against Lisa Raymond.

Raymond beat fifth-seeded Amy Frazier 6-4, 6-3 in the quarters, one night after ousting defending champion Natasha Zvereva.

In the best match of the day, fourth-seeded Brenda Schultz and No. 7 Garrison Jackson battled through a 2-hour, 30-minute three-setter before Garrison Jackson prevailed 6-7 (7-4), 6-3, 7-6 (7-4).

Becker struggles in Marseille

In Marseille top seed Boris Becker fought back from losing a marathon 24-point second set tie-break and squandering six match points to beat fellow German Joern Renzenbrink on Friday in the Marseille Men's Indoor tournament.

It took the former world number one three sets and just over two hours to tame Renzenbrink 7-6, 6-7, 6-2 and secure a place in the semifinals.

Becker had little trouble winning the first set tie-break 7-1, but the second proved a totally different matter.

Each player had six chances to win the set — and in Becker's case the match — as the tie-break seesawed with the hard-hitting Renzenbrink firing down a series of aces.

Becker responded by moving up a gear as Renzenbrink tired and comfortably took the deciding set to earn a match against Frernchman Olivier Delaitre for a place in Sunday's final.

Delaitre, the fourth seed, had a much easier passage, crushing Czech David Rikl in straight sets 6-2, 6-2.

However, Czech Daniel Vacek kept his country's hopes alive when he ousted second seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov of Russia 7-5, 7-6.

Gaudenzi, Ferreira reach Dubai semis

In Dubai, United Arab Emirates Andrea Gaudenzi overcame windy conditions to beat Henrik Holm 6-4, 6-2 Friday, sending the Italian into the semifinals at the Dubai Open.

Gaudenzi, ranked 24th on the ATP Tour and who upset No. 2 seed Goran Ivanisevic in the first round, let the tall Sweden beat himself. Holm had six double faults and ironically, the only two aces of the match.

In another quarterfinal, No. 4 seed Wayne Ferreira of South Africa ended wild-card Pat Cash's run, routing the Australian 6-1, 6-2 on the hardcourts of the aviation club.

In another quarterfinal match, Spain's Javier Sanchez earned a 6-2, 6-4 victory over Australia's Todd Woodbridge and now meets Ferreira in the semifinals.

And No. 6 seed Petr Korda of the Czech Republic beat Germany's Carsten Arriens 4-6, 6-2, 6-4. Korda now will play Gaudenzi in the semifinals.

NBA stars contemplate all-Star weekend

PHOENIX (AP) — In the eyes of classic long-range shooters like Larry Bird and Reggie Miller, the 22-foot arc has turned the NBA 3-point shooting contest into an exercise for centres, power forwards and other low-lifes.

"Larry Bird would be ashamed to be in this event," Reggie Miller, a critic of the shortened 3-point distance this season, said Friday. "But since I'm in it, I want to win it."

Bird, who won the first three long distance shootouts from 1986-88, has scoffed at any 3-point records set this season because the distance has been cut from 23-9.

Besides his shooting skill, Bird took advantage of his ability to shoot 3-pointers as a set shot to outlast exhausted jump shooters in the late rounds. With the shorter distance contest, stamina could be less of a factor.

"I got worn down last year," said Chicago's Steve Kerr, the No. 2.3-point shooter in the NBA this season at 47.7 per cent. "I had a great first round and thought, 'this is going to be easy,' but I couldn't hit anything in the second round. The shorter shot makes it easier."

Chuck Person, making his first appearance in the contest after nine seasons in the NBA, declared himself the favorite in the event because of his upper-body strength and strong legs.

"It's in the bag," said Person, probably most famous for his trash-talking battles with the now-retired Bird. "I'm strong in the upper body, and with the shorter distance, I don't have to jump as high and push off as hard. But the key is getting past the first round."

Minnesota Timberwolves centre Charles Shakelford # 17 jumps overs Chicago Bulls centre Luc Longley

Miller, who has been in three previous long distance shootouts, agreed with Person that the first round is "the nervous round. Everybody goes in thinking they're going to win, and they are afraid they'll be humiliated if they don't shoot well in the first round."

The contest lost its favorite when Mark Price, who hoped to join Bird and Craig hodges as three-time winners, was injured.

"When Mark Price went out, I thought I would be able to wag my tongue in the locker room beforehand," said Miller, a 43.2 per cent 3-point shooter this season. "Then Chuck Person came in and that strategy went out the window. He taught me everything I know about talking."

Dana Barros, a virtual unknown before making Sunday's All-Star game as a backup for the Eastern Confere,ce will be going into the long distance shootout as the NBA's leader in 3-point accuracy, 49.0 per cent.

Barros, slight of build and the shortest competitor at 5-foot-11, said stamina was not a factor last year when he lost to Price 25-13 in the final round.

"I wasn't tired," he said. "I shoot hundreds of 3s every day. Tiredness did not come into play. You only have to shoot 25 balls in each round. It's not like you have to take 70 shots in a row."

Also in the long distance shootout are Scott Burrell, Dan Majerle, Niuck Anderson and Glen Rice.

Majerle leads the NBA in 3-point attempts with 340, but has made just 38.2 per cent.

"I never get tired of shooting 3s," said Majerle, who should benefit from playing in his home arena in Phoenix. "Every round that goes by, my chances get bigger."

Isaiah Rider will defend his title in the slam-dunk contest against Tony Dumas of Dallas, Antonio Harvey of the Lakers, Miami's Harnold Miner, Utah's Jamie Watson and Tim Perry of Philadelphia.

"Last year, I had home-court advantage (in Minneapolios)," Rider said. "I think it will be a lot closer this year, but I have some things that will get big numbers."

Rider admitted that the slam-dunk contest has lost some of its luster from previous All-Star Saturdays when Michael Jordan and Dominique Wilkins were featured.

"I'd like to see us be able to use props," Rider said. "There are only so many dunks you can do. Props would make it interesting again."

Williams: Italians will cite steering failure in Senna crash

DIDCOT, England (AP) — An Italian magistrate is likely to report that a broken steering column caused the accident that killed three-time world champion Ayrton Senna, according to Williams-Renault chairman Frank Williams.

Williams is fearful that Bologna magistrate Maurizio Passarini, whose report is expected in the next few days, will recommend that criminal charges be brought against both Williams and the team's technical director, Patrick Head.

"We are expecting the report any day," Williams told British journalists at the team's headquarters. "They tend to think the column broke. That is what they have talked about a great deal. We haven't seen the car for a proper inspection yet so we are not able to defend ourselves."

Senna's Williams-Renault Fw16b/2 was impounded by Italian authorities after his crash during the San Marino Grand Prix at Imola, Italy, on May 1 last year.

Senna died after he mysteriously went straight off the track at the Tamburello turn on the sixth lap of the race and crashed head-on into a concrete barrier at 209 kph (131 mph). An autopsy revealed that the 34-year-old Brazilian was killed by a piece of the car's suspension that pierced his helmet.

The cause of the crash has never been explained, although Senna's failure to make the turn could indicate a problem with the steering.

"Mybe it broke, maybe it didn't," Williams said. "But the report will say what their group of experts think or what is their judgement of what happened.

"I wait with some trepidation, because if they say that the column broke then it reflects badly on us. It could be the start of a long procedure, which would not be a pleasant experience.

"We'll get the car back soon after the report is released and have an independent examination. We'd be more comfortable with a report we'd had an input to. It has been a problem having this hanging over us and it has affected a lot of people."

Passarini is also investigating the death of Austrian driver Roland Ratzenberger, whose Simtek-Ford crashed during qualifying the day before the race.

If charges are brought as a result of either accident, Williams said it would force Formula One's governing body to consider the viability to staging races in Italy.

"The big problem is, could we race in Italy again?" Williams, said. "Today it is us, tomorrow it could be McLaren or anybody else."

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANNAH HIRSCH

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COMBINE THOSE CHANCES

Both vulnerable. South deals.

NORTH
♠ A 8 7 4 2
♡ 9 7 4 3
♢ A
♣ A K 3

WEST
♠ K 10 3
♡ Q 8 6 2
♢ Q J 6 3
♣ 9 5

EAST
♠ Q 9 6 5
♡ K J 10 5
♢ 7 2
♣ 10 7 2

SOUTH
♠ J
♡ A
♢ K 10 9 8 5 4
♣ Q J 8 6 4

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 ♢	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♡	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	4 ♣	Pass
4 ♡	Pass	4 ♠	Pass
5 ♣	Pass	5 ♢	Pass
6 ♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening lead: Two of ♡

All roads do not necessarily lead to Rome. You would be better advised to pick out the right trail and ignore the red herrings.

Six clubs is an excellent contract. Played correctly, it will succeed whenever clubs are 3-2 and diamonds 4-2 or, if trumps are 4-1, when diamonds are 3-3. North-South used a series of cue-bids, with North striving for a grand slam, to get to the optimum spot. Since North's two hearts, the fourth suit, created a game force, there was no need to bid more than four clubs [illegible] setting the scene for the cue-bidding sequence that followed.

At one table declarer chose a simple line. The ace of diamonds was cashed, trumps were drawn, followed by king of diamonds and another. When the suit split 4-2 with no honor appearing on the first two rounds, there were only 11 tricks to be had.

Another declarer tried a slightly different tack. The ace of diamonds was cleared, followed by the ace and king of trumps. Declarer came to hand with a heart ruff, cashed the king of diamonds and ruffed a diamond. East overruffed and declarer still had to lose a diamond—again down one.

The successful declarers won the opening lead, unblocked the ace of diamonds, then cashed the ace and queen of trumps. Had someone failed to follow, declarer would have had to rely on a 3-3 diamond break—cash the king, ruff a diamond, return to hand with a heart ruff, draw a third round of trumps with the jack and then run diamonds until the defender ruffs. When both followed, declarer ruffed a diamond with the king, returned to hand with a heart ruff to draw the last trump, then conceded a diamond.

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The Immigrant
Shows: 12:30, 3:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30

Cinema Tel.: 699238
PLAZA
Eric Roberts & Geff Fahey in...
FREEFALL
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 8:30, 10:30
The movie: THE LION KING will be shown on Fridays and Thursdays at 10:30 a.m. & 12:30 p.m.

Cinema Tel.: 677420
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ROBOCOP '3'
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هكذا من الأصل

Amman talks on displaced tentatively set for Feb. 26

By P. V. Vivekanand

Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Israel, Egypt and Jordan will meet in Amman this month to discuss the fate of the Palestinians displaced in the 1967 war, sources said Saturday.

The sources said the meeting would be at the level of foreign ministers and would take place on Feb. 26, but a definite date was expected to be finalised and announced by the foreign ministers of the four-party meeting in Washington on Sunday.

The discussion on the displaced Palestinians comes in line with a provision in the Sept. 13 declaration of principles signed by Israel and the PLO.

The foreign ministers of Jordan and Egypt and the head of the political department of the PLO met in Cairo last week to coordinate positions ahead of the expanded meeting with Israel.

The ministers, Abdul Karim Kabariti of Jordan and Amr Musa of Egypt, and Farouk Kaddoumi of the PLO endorsed a set of proposals that set out the rights of each category of displaced people and discussed means to facilitate their repatriation in accordance with a timetable.

The proposals and timetable, details of which have not been revealed, will be presented to Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres during the Amman meeting.

Egypt, the PLO and Jordan have their own statistics and data base on the displaced, collected over the last one year. The figures have not been released.

Israel is expected its own version of concept of the rights of the displaced and negotiators expect hard discussions.

According to a senior official, "the most important thing is to speak with one voice while dealing with Israel."

"It means that the date presented by Jordan, Egypt and the PLO should be compatible," said the official.

"Hopefully we have achieved that coordination in the Cairo meeting," the official added.

Israel and the PLO are not scheduled to take up the issue of "refugees" — those who lost their homes in British mandate Palestine when the Jewish state was created in 1948 — until they begin "final status" negotiations in 1996.

Many of the Palestinians who fled the West Bank to Jordan during the 1967 war were residents of camps in the territory and classified as refugees since they were forced out of their homes to the West Bank in 1948. So, the actual number of Palestinians who came to Jordan in 1967 is much higher than the often-mentioned but varying figures of the "displaced."

Political observers believed Israel would not allow any large-scale repatriation of the estimated 900,000 "displaced" Palestinians to their homeland in the immediate phase.

According to PLO officials Yasser Abed Rabbo and Nabil Shaath, more than 300,000 Palestinians were displaced during the 1967 war and over 95 per cent of them fled to Jordan and their number has grown to 900,000 with descendants.

Under the international law, descendants of displaced have the same rights of their parents. As such, all the 900,000 claim the right to be repatriated home.

Israel, which also expelled more than 2,500 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip after occupying the territories in 1967, has allowed several hundred Palestinians to return home in line with requests made by the PLO.

None of them was from the category of displaced. According to analysts, Israel, mindful of setting a precedent, has been careful not to allow any "displaced" persons to return home, leaving the issue to negotiations with the Palestine National Authority (PNA) in Gaza and Jericho.

But Israeli permission to allow the return of the displaced is largely seen many critics of the Israel-PLO peace deal as a key indicator of the success of the self-rule accord and of Israel's good-faith intentions to honour the rights of the Palestinian people.

"Let us forget for a moment about economic development and self-rule elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," said Mohammad Atwaik, who was three when his family had to flee Ramallah in the West Bank. "Let us see whether and when I can go back to Ramallah and claim my father's land where I would like to work. That will be the fruit of the peace process."

"I am afraid I might be 80 or 90 when the Israelis get around to allowing me to go back," added Mr. Atwaik, an oddjob man at the Abdali central bus station and a resident of the Beqaa refugee camp.

Iranian women belonging to the Islamic Basiji militia march in the capital Tehran on Saturday to mark the 16th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution (AFP photo)

Egyptian unionists stage protest

CAIRO (R) — Doctors, engineers, lawyers and other professionals whose unions are dominated by Islamists, marched in Cairo on Saturday to protest against alleged government interference.

Hundreds of other Islamist union members waved placards and chanted in front of parliament, denouncing a legal amendment which they fear the government will use to drive them out of the associations.

The demonstrators, who converged on Cairo from several provinces, waved placards, that read "No to government interference. Only unions can decide." Some chanted "Allahu Akbar" as they stood outside parliament buidlings in crowded downtown Cairo.

Dozens of riot police stood by but did not intervene. A planned demonstration by lawyers last year turned bloody when police prevented them from marching to a presidential palace.

The legal amendemnt, which strengthens the role of the judiciary in supervising association elections, is at committee stage in parliament and could go before full house next week.

Many of the protesters were young, bearded men who belong to the large Islamist movement within the unions, but some were non-Islamists who had come to protest what they see as government interference in their affairs.

A delegation from the protesters met the deputy parliament speaker, Ahmad Hammadi, to present the group's petition. Mr. Hammadi told them parliament would not pass the amendment until it had considered the unions' objections, one protestor said.

The associations representing lawyers, doctors and engioneers have held emergency meetings and rallies over the last four days to campaign against the amendment.

The doctors and engineers put large paid advertisements in government newspapers

(Continued on page 7)

Iran celebrates anniversary with anti-Western defiance

TEHRAN (Agencies) — Marchers thronged the streets of Tehran on Saturday to celebrate the 16th anniversary of the Islamic revolution.

Shouts of "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" rose forth from some parts of the procession, which the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) estimated at several million strong.

However, at the central Azadi Square where they assembled reporters estimated a crowd of about a half million people.

President Hashemi Rafsanjani told the crowd that the West is mistaken if it thinks communism has been replaced as its main threat by fundamentalist Islam, which became state dogma in Iran after the Feb. 11, 1979, founding of the Islamic republic.

"They have made a big blunder by drawing such a comparison," he said in the speech, broadcast live on national radio.

Mr. Rafsanjani was referring to comments by the chief of the Western military alliance, Willy Claes, who said recently that Muslim "fundamentalism is at least as dangerous as communism was."

The 16 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies agreed Wednesday to set up closer links with Israel, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania to counter what they see as the destabilising influence of Islamic fundamentalism. During the cold war, NATO's main function was to defend Western Europe from the Soviet Union.

On Friday, U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich seconded Mr. Claes' warning. He said the United States must focus its national security policy on the "worldwide phenomenon of Islamic totalitarianism funded and largely directed by the state of Iran."

Mr. Rafsanjani said the West's "second mistake" was to assume Iran is meddling in other countries' affairs. That error, he claimed, only enhances Islam's appeal.

"Iran has no physical presence in other Islamic countries. By raising such false issues, you make the people of the world more eager to hear the message of Iran and the Koran."

On Feb. 11, 1979, revolutionaries inspired by a Shiite Muslim cleric, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, proclaimed the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran after overthrowing Shah Mohammad Reza Palavi.

The following year the nation began an eight-year war with Iraq. It is still trying to recover from the damage the war caused to the oil-dependent economy.

Iran blames the West for its woes. IRNA characterised the country over the past 16 years as "a nation faced with innumerable plots, mischievous acts and ill-intentions of the enemies."

Despite the anti-Western rhetoric, the mood at the rally was largely festive.

Street vendors did brisk business. Families with small children strolled through the

(Continued on page 3)

Russians shift shelling to town east of Grozny; deaths mount

ARGUN, Russia (Agencies) — Heavy Russian shelling hit the Chechen town of Argun on Saturday, two months after the Kremlin sent its army to subdue the rebel region in what it expected would be a brief campaign.

There was no attempt by the Russian soldiers to move forward, across the Argun River flowing by the town 15 kilometres to the east of the regional capital Grozny.

Over 100 Chechen irregulars had dug in along the opposite bank of the river, which the Russian forces were clearly reluctant to cross. The Chechens had one cannon which fired on the Russian positions.

Argun, which was once home to 30,000 residents, is linked to Grozny by straggling strips of houses. It is still held by Chechen irregulars and has been the scene of intense firefights during the passt few days.

On Saturday there was no sign of Russian warplanes and there was no sound of explosions coming from Grozny.

In Chechen Aul on the southern fringe of Grozny, another settlement still in the rebels' hands, many buildings were destroyed by the Russian shelling and billowed black smoke into the sky.

Chechen fighters, who have mostly left the capital, were digging in south of the city in an effort to cut off an expected Russian drive into the rebel-held countryside.

ITAR-TASS news agency said shooting in Grozny had nearly stopped and only sporadic fire was heard in the south of the ruined city. The remaining local residents were in dire need of drinking water and medicines, it said.

The press service of the Russian government, whose information often differs from eyewitness reports from Chechenya, said on Saturday that Chechen rebels were setting up "major resistance centres" in the west and east of the province.

Some 6,000 fighters concentrated on the western border near Ingushetia and another 5,500 in the east, near Dagestan.

Earlier, Moscow has repeatedly said that it was mostly mercenaries who were fighting on the side of the rebel Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev.

RIA news agency quoted Umar Avturkhanov, deputy head of the administration Moscow is seeking to install, as saying up to 80 per cent of the Chechen population opposed his body.

He added, though, that by the end of February the resistance by the independence fighters will be "fully crushed," RIA said.

In Moscow, several hundred people gathered to demand that the bloody military campaign in Chechenya be stopped.

Arab League wants Iraqi U.N. compliance

CAIRO (Agencies) — The Arab League is urging Iraq to mark the organisation's 50th anniversary in March by announcing it will comply with all United Nations resolutions, the league's head said Saturday.

"The Arab League is in permanent contact at all levels with Iraq to make it apply all U.N. resolutions and so allow Arab reconciliation," Esmat Abdul Meguid told the Saudi newspaper Al Asharq Al Awsat.

"I hope Baghdad will make an announcement on the 50th anniversary of the Arab League" on March 22 "which will help us to take a new step forward and contacts will continue up until the last moment," he said.

Ministers from the Cairo-based Arab League's 21-member states and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) are to meet here on March 22.

The last Arab summit took place in August 1990, just after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait which deeply divided Arab countries over involvement of a U.S.-led coalition in the crisis.

The U.N. Security Council has demanded that Iraq release Kuwaiti prisoners of war, return Kuwaiti property, dismantle its weapons of mass destruction and submit to long-term monitoring of its arms programme before crippling sanctions imposed in 1990 are lifted.

Dr. Abdul Meguid told the London-based Arabic paper published in several regional capitals that Arab League members would also decide on what joint position to adopt over signing a renewal of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in April in New York.

Egypt has threatened not to sign the treaty unless Israel joins up. The Jewish state, which has never acknowledged reports it has 200 nuclear warheads, refuses to sign the NPT.

Dr. Abdul Meguid said "some countries would tend to sign the NPT without an Israeli commitment, which means we need Arab coordination on this issue.

"A definite decision will be taken in March."

Iraq urge end to rift

Iraq on Saturday urged Arab countries to heal rifts caused by the Gulf crisis in order to present a united front against Israel and the West.

"Divisions only serve the interests of imperialists and the Zionists who want to seize the resources of Arab countries," the pro-government Al Iraq daily said.

"So it is up to these countries to forget their disputes, to work for reunification and to open a new chapter in their relations."

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein said last month that his country was "vital" to protect the security of Arab countries against Israel and Iran.

The Babel daily accused Saudi Arabia and Kuwait which oppose the lifting of sanctions of "wanting to maintain (inter-Arab) division."

The newspaper welcomed the fact that "certain Arab countries are trying to save the Arab Nation by sincere calls for a return to communal Arab action."

Ekeus to visit Iraq

U.N. disarmament expert Rolf Ekeus is expected to fly to Baghdad on Feb. 19 for his first visit since Iraq criticised him for failing to free the country from sanctions.

David Underwood, the commission's Bahrain-based regional chief, said Mr. Ekeus will stay in Baghdad two to four days. He declined to comment on the purpose of the visit.

Mr. Ekeus heads the U.N. Special Commission in charge of eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Algerian group threatens more violence

PARIS (Agencies) — An armed radical Algerian group said Saturday that it might resort to "other forms of jihad (holy war)" in its bid to overthrow the military regime in Algeria.

"The soldiers of God are capable of using other forms of jihad to terrorise the enemies of religion," the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), considered the armed wing of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), said in its clandestine bulletin, Al Fath Al Mubine.

The reference to new forms of holy war was taken as referring to such suicide attacks as that of Jan. 30, on the main police station in central Algiers in which a carbomber killed 42 people and injured 286 more, according to official figures.

However, the bulletin, numbered 35 and dated Feb. 10, did not refer explicitly to that bombing, for which another organisation, the Islamic Armed Group (GIA), has said it was responsible.

The bulletin claims "hundreds of young men are ready to sacrifice themselves on the path of God to fight injustice" and continues "neither killings nor torture will make the Algerian Muslim nation led by the FIS yield."

It said that the "pressures" exercised on FIS chiefs, such as the change of residence of its leader and deputy leader Abassi Madani and Ali Belhadj, who are under house arrest, "are only a vain attempt to influence the morale of... the political and military leadership."

Algerian Foreign Minister Mohammad Salah Dembri has confirmed the two men have been transferred.

The bulletin reports the death of one of the leaders of the AIS in central Algeria, Abdul Wahab, in a clash with security forces but gives no details as to the site of the clash or of any other losses in the group led by him.

It reports only that he was a native of Ouled Yaiche, a fundamentalist stronghold near Blida in the south of the country.

France has delivered two helicopters to Algeria despite fears by Islamic opponents of Algeria's military-backed government that they will be refitted for military use, French media said on Saturday.

(Continued on page 7)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Syria 'refusing entry to Palestinians'

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — Syria is refusing to allow entry to Palestinians travelling from Jordan, a senior Palestinian official said on Saturday. "We have received reports from our people who could not enter Syria because they were carrying Palestinian travel documents and lived in Gaza and Jericho," Palestinian Authority member Hassan Asfour told Reuters. Palestinians in the self-rule areas of Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho carry passports issued by the Palestinian Authority. "The Syrian authorities are refusing to allow Palestinian passengers in," said Mr. Asfour, adding that "a large number" of Palestinians had been refused entry from Jordan to Syria. Mr. Asfour, a member of the Palestinian team negotiating with Israel over Palestinian elections, said he hoped a peace treaty between Syria and Israel would resolve the situation. "The Syrian-Palestinian relationship is politically confused. We hope that the Syrians will change their attitude towards our people after they sign a peace agreement with Israel within months," he said.

Female soldier missing in Israel

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli police have launched a hunt for a teenage female soldier missing for more than 24 hours, police said Saturday. Shiraz Iskin, 18, was last seen around dawn on Friday trying to start up her car to return to her parents home in Kfar Saba in the suburbs of Tel Aviv. She had just spent the evening with friends in a Tel Aviv bar. Her anxious father alerted police when she failed to arrive home and an elite unit has been combing the route she would have normally taken between the bar and her home. Volunteers have also joined in the search and a helicopter was overflying the area. Police have not ruled out any possibility, including that she may have been kidnapped or murdered.

Iran reports Iraqi violations of ceasefire

NICOSIA (R) — Iran has told the United Nations of 35 recent alleged violations by Iraq of a ceasefire that ended their eight-year war, Iran's IRNA agency said on Saturday. It said Iran's mission to the U.N. on Friday reported the violations, which happened between Oct. 23 and Nov. 15 last year. It said the report "referred to opening fire with light weapons towards Iran's territory, patrolling, concentration and stationing of Iraqi forces in no-man's-land, installation of barbed wire and machine guns, construction of military bases and new embankments ... and patrolling of Iraqi armoured units along border lines as instances of ceasefire violations." It also reported helicopters flying over no-man's-land in southern and western regions of the borders between the two countries whose 1980-88 war ended under a U.N.-sponsored ceasefire.

U.N. to close Mogadishu port for 6 days

MOGADISHU (AFP) — The U.N. Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) has ordered the port of Mogadishu closed to commercial shipping from Feb. 26 to March 3, U.N. officials said Saturday. Sources at the office of the U.N. secretary-general's deputy special representative, Hisham Omayad, said the port would reopen as UNOSOM began the final stage of withdrawing its 8,000 remaining troops from the war-torn Horn of Africa country. Mr. Omayad is also the chief of UNOSOM's committee for Mogadishu Port Authority. But the source did not indicate who will run the port after its reopening on March 4. UNOSOM had repeatedly called for the establishment of a joint committee, consisting of members from the main warring factions, to run the port authority after the U.N. pullout from Somalia.

Ben Yahia to tour Central Europe

TUNIS (AFP) — Tunisian Foreign Minister Habib Ben Yahia leaves Sunday for a week-long tour of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania, an official said here on Saturday. The minister will discuss trade and closer economic cooperation with his counterparts in the former East bloc countries, the official added. Tunisia wants to establish "non-competitive relations" with Central European countries engaged in economic reform programmes, the official added. The country began its own programme of economic reforms and market-opening measures in 1986 and has been negotiating a new cooperation accord with the European Union, its biggest trading partner, for the past year to fix quotas for access to the European market of Tunisian products, notably olive oil.

COLUMN

Welsh police search for baby-snatcher

RHYL, Wales (R) — Police were scanning hospital security video tapes Saturday to try to identify an abductor who snatched a four-day-old baby girl from a maternity ward. Police searched nearby countryside, using tracker dogs and a Royal Air Force helicopter with night vision equipment after the distraught mother raised the alarm on Friday night. They believe a woman visitor who asked 32-year-old Christine Owens if she could look at baby Lydia may have smuggled the child out of Glan Clwyd Hospital at Bodelwyddan, north Wales, in a holdall. "They went into the ward and visited Lydia's cot," a police spokesman said. "They then went into the ward day room and continued talking. Eventually the unidentified woman left, leaving Mrs. Owens in the day room. "A short time later Lydia was found to be missing from the ward." Police, who described the woman as being in her late 30s or early 40s, hope security cameras will reveal her identity. Hospital spokeswoman Tonia Perry said the woman was not known to the mother, who has to other children. "The mother is extremely distressed," she added. Lydia Owens was the fourth infant to be snatched in Britain the past five years. All were safely recovered.

Nurse gets 5 years for throwing infant against wall

LONDON (AFP) — A male nurse employed by a London children's hospital was sentenced to five years in prison for maltreating infants and, on at least one occasion, throwing a newborn against a wall, fracturing her skull. The London court heard that Richard Coleman, 29, broke the arm of a seven-month-old baby in 1994 through rough treatment. The defendant said he had fallen while carrying the child, but this was disproved by an expert witness. Seven months later, the court heard, while treating a seven-week-old girl at her home, he wrenched the newborn up by the arm and threw her against a wall. She suffered multiple cranial fractures and may have permanent damage. Mr. Coleman, a father of two children, admitted to being a moody person and said he had a tendency to hit things when he got upset. His lawyer, Alastair MacDuff, said Mr. Coleman was a "good nurse" and "adoring father" who had "simply snapped under pressure." But Judge Alan Hitching said that psychiatrists' reports gave no grounds for concluding that Mr. Coleman was mentally ill. The hospital said it had no reason to suspect maltreatment of children by Mr. Coleman until it heard about the incident with the newborn girl.

Prisoner on the run was freed by mistake

LONDON (AFP) — A prisoner is on the run after being released in error a week ago, the Prison Service confirmed. A police investigation was under way into how remand prisoner David Aves forged his release papers from Norwich jail, eastern England. According to Saturday's edition of The Sun, Aves, 36, who was awaiting trial at Ipswich Crown Court for theft, faked a fax from the court saying he should be released on bail. He was even given a lift to the station by prison officials, the tabloid newspaper claimed. A spokesman for the Prison Service said Friday's a senior governor from another prison was investigating the escape. "I cannot confirm that a forged fax was used. An investigation is under way into how he was released in error," he said. The security lapse follows a series of embarrassments for Britain's Prisons Service. In January, John Marriott was relieved of his duties as governor of the high security Parkhurst Prison on the Isle of Wight, following the escape of three inmates. Also in January, inmates at Eventhorpe jail in northeast England rioted, and accused serial murderer Frederick West was found hanged in his prison cell.

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